

OAGS & Section on General Surgery Position Statement

Date: April 9, 2020

Position on the Cancellation of Elective Surgery during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Ontario's General Surgeons are experiencing challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic that are impacting the provision of surgical care to our patients. We are dedicated to limiting the spread of this infection. This has required the cancellation of non-essential surgeries and limitation of office visits. We strive to continue to provide care to our postoperative patients and those awaiting surgery, with many of us incorporating video visits, telephone calls and email communication into our practices.

We are fully committed to provide the best possible care within our limited resources to our patients with cancer and those presenting with acute surgical emergencies. Guidance documents from Ontario Health are being used to help triage those cases requiring the most urgent care.

We will continue to strongly advocate for our patients with cancer during these difficult times. Currently, General Surgeons are able to provide urgent and emergency surgery to patients who have life threatening problems related to their cancer diagnosis or who must have surgery in a very specific time frame because of their other cancer treatments. Unfortunately, this does mean that some other cancer surgeries will be delayed.

We have sympathy for our patients who are awaiting surgery deemed non-essential and are aware that these unavoidable delays may impact their current quality of life and their future health outcomes. We are also aware that deferral of these surgeries will lead to backlogs once the crisis has passed. Following this pandemic, the OAGS and Section will advocate for increased resource allocation from both the provincial government and hospital administrations to ensure we can provide timely access to surgical care for those patients whose procedures have been deferred, without further delaying new patient access.

The pandemic situation is constantly changing and will continue to add a significant disease burden to hospitals within Ontario. We share with our patients the added anxiety and suffering they are likely experiencing. As such, we ask for patience and respect for the difficult decisions we have to make in prioritizing care during these unprecedented times.

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