

Improving Wait Times and Making the Most of Our Resources to Support the Best Possible Surgical Care

Response to Office of the Auditor General Report – April 3, 2018

Nova Scotia Health Authority's (NSHA) Perioperative (Surgical) Services team completes more than 70,000 surgeries a year, in 17 locations, at a total cost of more than \$225 million.

In the past, these sites have largely operated somewhat separately from one another with different resources, policies, information systems and approaches to care, however, through Nova Scotia Health Authority, a new provincial Perioperative Services leadership team is now in place, working with staff and physicians to better coordinate surgical services across the province. These efforts include responding to the recommendations of the Office of the Auditor General in relation to surgical wait times and operating room (OR) efficiency.

More connected teams, improved communication and engagement, shared policies and standards of care, improved data and reporting, a greater focus on research and outcomes, and other efforts, will all help to improve surgical care, wait times, and help Nova Scotians be healthier.

Greater Coordination for Improved Efficiency and Better Care

Provincial and zone perioperative leaders meet often to support planning and have teams focused on areas such as wait times and efficiency. A provincial Perioperative Quality Council is being formed to oversee quality improvement efforts and patient representatives have been recruited to be part of this council. A communications advisor has joined the program to support public engagement and increase communication.

A task group on OR efficiencies has helped the Perioperative team begin tracking and reporting on the following measures of how well services are performing. Targets are being set for each and will help the team see where things are working well and areas for improvement.

- *OR Utilization* – Measures the planned versus the actual cases performed in the OR on any day.
- *First Case On Time Start* – Tracks if the day's first case began on time or why it was delayed.
- *Turnaround Time* – Tracks how long it takes to prepare an OR for the next scheduled case.
- *Same Day Cancellations* – Number of surgeries postponed on the day they were scheduled for, including the reason for delay (e.g. emergency case, no inpatient bed for admission).
- *Case Length* – Amount of time from when the patient entered the OR to when they left.

The Perioperative team has also been gathering information on: wait times for various surgeries (at each facility/for each surgeon); why surgeries are postponed and how they are rescheduled, along with the hours operating rooms are in use, and how this time is shared for different types of surgeries. Taking a closer look at all of the resources available in the province, and where and how they can best be used, will help to improve care and ensure more efficient service delivery.

Helping Nova Scotians Access the Surgeries they Need

Having better access to the services they need is important to Nova Scotians and a key priority for NSHA. Shorter waits for surgeries can offer patients a better quality of life and better results after their surgery. A Wait Time Advisory team is offering support to programs and has drafted a strategy that teams in many areas can use to improve their wait times.

Perioperative leaders and teams now have access to new tools and reports to better measure, manage and improve wait times. Wait time data, and updates on efforts to improve access, are provided to the Perioperative team and will soon be posted on the NSHA website.

A review of surgical wait times revealed the areas of surgery with the longest waits and teams have set five priorities for initial focus. Reducing waits for orthopedics (hip and knee replacements) is at the top of this list, along with urology, general surgery, otorhinolaryngology (ear, nose and throat surgery) and thoracic surgery.

Additional government funding in recent years has allowed more hip and knee cases to be completed. This includes new funding announced in 2017-18 and new funding committed in the 2018-19 budget, to support NSHA's new multi-year action plan for orthopedics.

With some of the highest wait times for these services in the country, Nova Scotia requires a bold and innovative plan that will help us begin to make headway and lead to lasting improvements over time. The plan was developed and is being acted on by a team that includes surgeons, anesthesiologists and other perioperative leaders and staff. Investing in people, equipment, facilities and other changes, will help NSHA do more hip and knee surgeries each year, improve care and bring wait times down to the national six-month target. The goal of the plan is to clear the backlog of patients waiting for hip or knee replacements, ensuring they have their surgery by March 2020; or sooner in most cases, and allowing those added to the list after March 2020 to have surgery within six months.

Progress is being made and will continue to accelerate as new elements of the plan are put in place:

- NSHA targeted doing do more hip and knee replacements in 2017-18, with the five hospitals that do these cases making time available in their ORs however they could, including extending hours and working through peak vacation periods where possible. Final numbers are being compiled, but as of mid-March, NSHA was projecting to complete 85 per cent of its targeted new cases.
- More OR nurses and medical device reprocessing technicians were hired at some sites to help provide more surgeries and recruitment began in January for four new orthopedic surgeons and four new anesthesiologists. There has been great interest in these roles with three specialists confirmed and discussions underway with other candidates.
- NSHA is planning to bring in other roles that will help improve care, including social workers and dietitians, along with new OR roles to assist with hip and knee cases.
- The support patients receive before and after surgery is important to their recovery too, so Orthopedic Assessment Clinics are being expanded and improved to offer similar services across all sites. They will help patients get the best results from their surgery and will also have a greater focus on wellness. They could also help a patient delay or avoid the need for surgery altogether, if support for things like exercise and healthy eating, improve their hip or knee problems.
- NSHA's Orthopedic Assessment Clinics will also help manage intake and wait lists. Teams are developing common intake and referral processes and looking into tools that can be used to keep one wait list that could match patients to the locations and surgeons with the shortest waits if they choose.
- A patient/family representative has been recruited to join the committee overseeing the plan and will bring a patient voice to the table to better understand their ideas and needs. Other patient and family engagement strategies are also being planned.
- New communication strategies and tools are being developed to help provide more information to Nova Scotians about wait times, what they can expect and the gains being made.

The Perioperative Services Program continues to look for new ways to improve services and provide more timely access to surgery for Nova Scotians. This includes using the same collaborative approach used to develop and action the plan for orthopedics, to develop plans for other priority areas.