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Message from the Chair

Increased fairness and consistency, and improved surgical care system information... that's precisely what health partners are working toward and what they will achieve in Saskatchewan by fall 2003.

Physicians and Health Regions in Saskatchewan are moving forward with the implementation of a new Patient Assessment Process and Surgical Patient Registry, initiatives that will refashion the way surgical wait lists are managed in the province.

Three Health Regions have recently announced full implementation of both initiatives. Other Regions will follow, as they work to establish both the process for determining patient need for surgery and the comprehensive database that will track all patients as they move through the system. Regina Qu'Appelle and Saskatoon Health Regions, due to the increased complexity of their organizations and computer technology, will be implementing these initiatives on a "specialty by specialty" basis throughout the summer.

However, as we move forward, it is of utmost importance to ensure that our new patient assessment tools and processes are as effective as possible. In creating a new standardized process, Saskatchewan is taking a significant step forward in ensuring consistency for all surgical patients. And because this process has been developed with and by specialists across the province, we are confident that it will be beneficial in determining patient priority. However, to verify that the new assessment process functions as intended, the SSCN has come together with members of the Western Canada Wait List (WCWL) project to formally evaluate it and make recommendations regarding any necessary refinements.

I look forward to the results and findings of this research and to establishing a common set of facts that will help to ensure timely and appropriate surgical care for all Saskatchewan residents.

*Peter Glynn, Ph.D.
Chair, Saskatchewan Surgical Care Network*

Improvements to Surgical Care System Underway

Patients in Saskatchewan will soon benefit from two significant enhancements to the surgical care system that will improve timely access to surgery through better management of surgical wait lists.

Health Minister John Nilson and Dr. Peter Glynn, Chair of the Saskatchewan Surgical Care Network (SSCN), recently announced full implementation of a the Surgical Patient Registry and new Patient Assessment Process in Five Hills, Prince Albert Parkland and Sunrise Health Regions. The two initiatives are an integral part of the government's strategy to reduce waiting times for surgery, as outlined in *The Action Plan for Saskatchewan Health Care*, announced in December 2001.

“Strengthening our surgical care system for the citizens of our province is a key part of our government's Health Action Plan. It underscores our government's top priority to improve the quality of health services and access to care, while ensuring our health system is sustainable into the future,” said Nilson at a news conference in Moose Jaw, where the surgical initiatives were tested in a pilot project earlier this year.

The Surgical Patient Registry will track all patients needing surgery in the province. This patient tracking system will generate current, accurate information that will better inform the decisions of physicians, Regional Health Authorities and Saskatchewan Health as they work together to meet the needs of surgical patients in the province. The Patient Assessment Process will support the Registry and will help to ensure that the level of need for surgery is determined for each patient consistently and fairly across the province.

“Saskatchewan is the first province to move forward with such a comprehensive strategy to improve surgical care,” said Dr. Peter Glynn, SSCN Chair. “It is hoped that with improved surgical wait list information, better decisions will result in shorter wait times for patients.”

Province-wide rollout of the Surgical Patient Registry and the Patient Assessment Processes will continue throughout summer with all Regional and Provincial hospitals implementing the initiatives by fall 2003.

SSCN and WCWL Evaluating New Patient Assessment Process

The SSCN and the Western Canada Waiting List (WCWL) project are joining forces to ensure that the new patient assessment tools and process in the province are valid and reliable.

As part of the implementation of the new assessment process, a working group consisting of representatives and researchers from the SSCN, WCWL, Saskatchewan Health and Saskatoon and Regina Qu'Appelle Health Regions will begin to evaluate the patient assessment tools for each specialty in the context of the Saskatchewan wait list management system. The group will use data from the patient assessment tools and process and feedback from specialists to confirm the appropriateness and accuracy of the process.

“Evaluation of the assessment process is key to the success of this initiative and one of the SSCN’s top priorities,” Trent Truscott, Surgical Registry Office Manager. “Together, the Regions, the WCWL, and the SSCN will identify the issues and bring forward the changes necessary so that the assessment tools and processes work for everyone involved.”

Over the past year, the SSCN, Saskatchewan Health and surgical specialists across the province, have developed a new assessment process that includes:

- 1) patient assessment tools for each specialty;
- 2) a common understanding of the “urgency” of specific surgical procedures required; and,
- 3) a common method of determining patients’ relative need for surgery.

Each patient assessment tool includes a number of weighted priority criteria. Calculation of these criteria results in assessment scores that reflect the relative urgencies of surgical patients. These scores will be used in combination with procedure-specific urgency timeframes to determine overall urgency scores and priority levels for individual patients.

To ensure that the scores produced by these calculations are appropriate and useful, the working group will test them for both “reliability” and “validity”. Reliability refers to the consistency of scores. Reliable scoring will mean that similar patients will receive similar scores regardless of where in Saskatchewan they are being assessed.

Validity is a process of evaluating the degree to which the available evidence supports the use of the priority criteria score as a measure of patient urgency and priority. Valid results will mean that patients will be prioritized accurately and appropriately.

The SSCN/WCWL Research and Evaluation Working Group will:

- assess the reliability and validity of the patient assessment tools in real world settings.
- determine the acceptability, utility, and feasibility of the priority criteria scores when used in combination with procedure-specific urgency bands.
- recommend revisions to the tools where necessary, based on reliability and validity evidence.
- produce guidelines for the interpretation of scores and make recommendations for appropriate use of the priority tools.

“Specialists in Saskatchewan were instrumental in developing this promising and innovative method of assessing patient urgency,” said Dr. Mark Ogrady. “The SSCN plans to continue to work with physicians to change and perfect the tools and the process to ensure the best possible outcome for all surgical patients in the province.”

A preliminary evaluation report is anticipated by December 31, 2003.

On The Horizon

Implementation of Patient Assessment Process and Surgical Patient Registry

Health Region	Implementation Target
Five Hills, Sunrise, Prince Albert Parkland	Summer 2003
Prairie North, Regina Qu'Appelle, Saskatoon, Heartland, Kelsey Trail, Sun Country, Cypress	Fall 2003



For More Information

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