



**NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR  
MEDICAL ASSOCIATION**

**NLMA calls for public release of government's plan for reopening medical services**

**For immediate release – June 29, 2020**

The Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association (NLMA) is calling on the Minister of Health to publicly release the government's plan for the reopening of medical services across the province.

At a news conference earlier today, the NLMA called upon the Minister and the regional health authorities (RHAs) to release their plan, as well as benchmarks by specialty or service area so the public can see the progress being made towards returning to normal. Physicians support this process by collaboratively planning with RHAs, prioritizing the urgent cases on their waitlists, reassessing patients, and making themselves available when hospital resources are freed up.

“Physicians and the public must be informed about the plan for achieving normal levels of service and the timeframe for dealing with the expanded waitlists that accumulated during the lockdown,” said NLMA President Dr. Charlene Fitzgerald.

“To get a better understanding of the current situation, we asked physician section heads, some of the most informed people in our health system, to provide estimates of current service levels as a percentage of normal service levels within their disciplines. The data was collected between June 20-22. This data is based on the informed views of frontline physicians, not on hospital databases, but it is still a revealing portrait of where we stand at present. The picture that emerges is that on average we are at 30-50% of normal volume across the specialties” said Dr. Fitzgerald.

Last week, the NLMA provided this data to Health Minister John Haggie and requested details about his plans for re-opening health services. Minister Haggie advised that he has directed the health system to re-open health services to 85% of normal levels by July 6.

“We were surprised by this revelation for two main reasons. First, we were unaware of a planning process that involved doctors to establish such a target, and second, we are skeptical and doubtful that such a target can be achieved by July 6. Our members tell us that medical services will not return to pre-COVID levels for some time,” said Dr. Fitzgerald.

Physicians who work in hospital settings rely on hospital resources, operating room time and clinic time. They do not control how much time they are granted. RHAs control which services are allowed to re-start in their facilities, the allocation of resources, the rules for PPE, physical distancing requirements, and the number of patients that can be seen. They also require patients to be tested for COVID-19 prior to any aerosol generating procedures.

“These restrictions are put in place for good reason. They are there to protect the staff and patients in their facilities. The NLMA supports these restrictions, which is why we need a plan that takes a realistic assessment of the constraints and sets out targets that may vary by specialty or service,” said Dr. Fitzgerald.

“We need clear direction on how we are going to get our health care system back to normal. The people of this province deserve full and open transparency about the level of service they can expect to receive from their health care system. And they need it now.”