



**NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR
MEDICAL ASSOCIATION**

NLMA provides update on reopening of medical services

For immediate release – July 7, 2020

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

Two weeks ago, Health Minister John Haggie advised the NLMA that he has directed the health system to return to 85% of capacity by July 6th. At a news conference last week, 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.

“It is now July 7th, one day after the Minister's target for resumption of services up to 85%. As of today, no plan has been released. Therefore, the NLMA is providing another update to the public,” said NLMA President Dr. Charlene Fitzgerald.

Once again, the NLMA consulted with discipline section heads to provide estimates of current medical service levels as a percentage of normal service volumes. The data was collected up to July 6th. The data is based on the informed views of frontline physicians, not on hospital databases, but it is still a revealing portrait of where specific services stand at present.

- Family medicine, which is done mainly in private offices, ranges in capacity between 230 and 85%
- Anesthesia at St. Clare's is currently operating at about 50%;
- Allergy Medicine is 100%;
- ENT is operating at 50% - 70%;
- Gastroenterology is seeing 50% outpatient clinics and 50% endoscopies;
- Plastic surgery is operating at 50-75% for minor procedures and 75% for major surgeries;
- Obstetrics and gynecology is seeing 50% - 60% clinic volume and operating room time is at 30%
- Urology is operating at 40% - 50% of normal capacity and there are concerns with the growing wait list, particularly for cancer patients;
- General internal medicine outpatient clinics are operating at 75% in St. John's
- General surgery is operating at about 80% or normal volumes.
- Dermatology, including the Janeway and Cancer Clinic is 40-50%;
- Cardiology is operating at 70-75% %
- Orthopedic surgery is operating at 50-60% in Eastern;
- Neurosurgery is operating at 60-70%
- Radiology at the Health Sciences is at approximately 60% of normal capacity and is expected to remain at this level until at least September;
- Respiriology is operating at 10% - 50% for procedures and 10% - 30% for clinics;
- Ophthalmology is 60% - 65%.

NEWS RELEASE

“While we supported the need for the lockdown, our attention has now shifted to our patients who are waiting for hospital services to reopen. Our concern is that for many of these patients, their health conditions may have become more acute while they have been waiting as a result of not being seen. Many patients are anxious about not knowing when they will be re-booked. That’s why we need more transparency about the plan for when specific services will be back to normal. Physicians also need this data so we know how to counsel our patients about their planned procedures and what they can do while they continue to wait,” said Dr. Fitzgerald.

“Some disciplines have made progress towards 85% and others are still distant from that target. This is not a reflection of the disciplines but rather the constraints under which they are operating. Many parts of the health system remain significantly below capacity for reasons beyond the control of physicians, as a result of hospital rules regarding social distancing, COVID-19 testing prior to certain procedures, PPE use, cleaning measures, and access to hospital resources, operating room time and clinic time,” she explained.

Regional health authorities have also moved to a summer slowdown schedule resulting in staffing levels dropping to 65 to 70% of pre-COVID levels.

Yesterday, the Education Minister and the school board publicly released a plan for reopening schools across the province. Once again, the NLMA is calling on the Minister of Health to release this province’s plan with specific timelines for increasing capacity levels of each service within the health care system, as well as data to track the province’s progress on a weekly basis.

“We are all working under the assumption that a second wave or resurgence of COVID-19 could come at any time. As we have been told by the Minister again and again, we must learn to live with COVID-19. So again, on behalf of physicians and all of our patients, where is the plan? How will the health care system live with COVID-19? How will we manage one health crisis without unintentionally creating another?” said Dr. Fitzgerald.

“We have an opportunity today that may not be here tomorrow, and the entire province is looking to the Minister of Health and Community Services to lead us through this. Doctors are ready to accelerate the volume of patient services and we are committed to working with the Department of Health and the regional health authorities to achieve this.”