

Re-opening of WLMH Operating Rooms (ORs) September 10, 2020

Critical safety upgrades required in the WLMH operating rooms (ORs) are now complete. Activity in the ORs will gradually resume, starting the week of September 14. This will allow patients will to receive high-quality procedures closer to home, in an environment that meets standards for safety and infection control.

When are the renovated ORs opening? What services will be delivered?

Procedures in the WLMH ORs will start in mid-September. Services will resume gradually, starting with scheduled C-section births, gynecology and day surgeries, and endoscopy. Bringing back services in a staged manner is standard practice to ensure the rooms, schedule and staff are ready to take on increased capacity over time.

What are the steps to re-open the ORs?

In early September, the ORs and endoscopy reprocessing areas will be set up with the equipment that was taken out prior to the renovations. This includes the new C-Arm and fluoroscopy table, point of care visualization ultrasound and endoscopy scope cabinet. This equipment will enhance the range of services we offer and the precision of those procedures. Staff are being reoriented in the space and with the equipment.

When will obstetrical services also resume?

Physicians and staff have continued to provide obstetrical care for patients during this time and will continue to do so going forward. Many obstetrics and gynecology patients have continued to receive care at WLMH from their care providers, including prenatal and post-natal appointments. Obstetricians have supported deliveries at Niagara Health (St. Catharine's site), including C-sections. In the coming weeks, scheduled C-sections will be available at WLMH.

When will surgical services include on-call coverage?

The goal is to increase coverage as much as possible in the current facility, while remaining focused on patient safety. In January, after hours, on-call coverage in support of the obstetrics program will resume based on the availability of staffing. The schedule for this initial coverage (i.e. which days), will be determined closer to that time.

It is worth noting that a safe and sustainable 24/7 obstetrics model is challenging to achieve in a two OR facility, which even at full capacity, falls short of the surgical patient volumes and OR staffing that is required to maintain a 24/7 on-call program. This is one of the reasons the rebuilt WLMH will have four ORs, as opposed to the current two ORs. The increased capacity in the new hospital will support the surgical patient volumes and staffing levels needed for a safe and sustainable, 24/7 on-call program.

What is happening with the hiring and training of surgical nurses for WLMH?

Hiring for staff vacancies is supported by cycles of posting and evaluating applicants. This is a standard process which is guided by collective agreements.

Many Ontario hospitals, including all HHS surgical sites, are experiencing systemic shortages of OR nurses. For this reason, HHS developed a first-in-Ontario OR nurse training program, dedicated to filling vacant roles at WLMH. HHS made considerable investment (\$500K) into the program and the nurses to make sure WLMH ORs are staffed for success.

The training program is currently underway, unfortunately, the global pandemic that started 6 months ago shut down ORs across Canada. Hospitals have not been able to run surgical training programs during this shut down. A renewed training schedule is being implemented as surgeries resume at WLMH and all other HHS sites.

A new hospital is in development - couldn't the safety upgrades have waited until then and avoided service disruptions?

In partnership with the Government of Ontario, HHS has invested significant time and resources ensuring WLMH is safe until the hospital is rebuilt. Critical safety upgrades were needed to assure this goal, which unfortunately disrupted service delivery and impacted staffing levels. This difficult decision prioritized patient safety above all else.

Work is now underway to build service levels and staffing back up to the greatest extent possible in anticipation of the new hospital being built.

How will obstetric patients be supported?

While we work to increase capacity for live births to the safest extent possible, a redirection plan developed by WLMH physicians and midwives is currently in place to enable births to occur at other area hospitals. This is safe interim plan. As mentioned above, scheduled C-section births will begin occurring within the weeks ahead. The WLMH emergency department is capable of supporting emergency births, in the event this is required.

More information for expectant parents is available [here](#).

Additional information is available at www.wlmh.ca, including the option to sign up to receive WLMH's e-newsletter – "What's Up @ WLMH."