



NEWSRelease

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David Thompson Health Region Responds to Staffing Challenges

RED DEER– Faced with ongoing pressures in the recruitment of trained operating room staff, the David Thompson Health Region announced today that it will be temporarily rescheduling some non-emergency, elective surgeries scheduled for RDRHC operating rooms.

In a news conference at the hospital, CEO John Vogelzang said that in effect, the hospital will implement a short-term strategy for operating rooms to ensure that patient safety and effective staffing levels are maintained. This means that the hospital will now operate with seven functioning operating rooms, a temporary reduction of one operating theatre.

“This decision has been made in conjunction with hospital surgeons and as a result of a recommendation from the OR Committee. We feel that this action represents the best way to maintain safe staffing levels for patients and staff as well as maintaining essential flexibility to cope with emergency procedures,” Vogelzang told reporters.

He also made it clear that the region is making every effort to keep both the public and patients up-to-date on the scheduling issue. “Patients are being contacted personally and are being informed of the new date for their procedure,” Vogelzang continued. “This is much better than going day-to-day for both patients and for operating room staff, many of whom have already had to work double shifts to maintain safe staffing levels.”

Vogelzang commended hospital staff for their extra efforts in working to maintain safe staffing levels at RDRHC. He also commended physicians for their cooperation during these difficult times.

Vogelzang said that the recruitment and retention of trained staff in many specialties is a long-term problem whose effects are being felt throughout all of Alberta’s health regions as well as both nationally and internationally. He said that mounting staffing pressures in several smaller medical facilities across the region over the past few months have forced the closure of 25 beds across the DTHR. In addition, as summer approaches the region also expects to face additional pressures Wetaskiwin, Olds and Drumheller.

Vogelzang noted that the health region has been working for the past three years on improving its recruitment strategies and while it has enjoyed a measure of success, shortages remain. He said direct health care providers such as Registered Nurses, Licenced Practical Nurses and nursing attendants are now in strong demand. He also noted that hospitals are now in competition with the private sector for technical support personnel such as cooks. In all, the region has more than 300 full and part time vacancies in its workforce of approximately 9000 employees.

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“This is not a financial resource issue...this is not an issue of a lack of government support. The current shortage of trained staff is the number one issue in health care today,” Vogelzang said.

He noted the region has been working cooperatively with the provincial departments of Alberta Health and Wellness, Employment and Immigration as well as Advanced Education to attract trained personnel from other countries to fill the staffing gap here. However, he also said the training of sufficient numbers of staff across the spectrum of medical specialties will be best addressed through a Made-in-Alberta solution of increased levels of medical education and training.

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