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Cause of residue on surgical instruments identified

More postponements today, normal surgical schedule expected by Monday

LETHBRIDGE — Chinook Regional Hospital is expected to return to a normal surgical schedule Monday after Alberta Health Services (AHS) officials identified the cause of a fine dark residue found on some surgical instruments earlier this week.

Fifty-five surgeries, day procedures and other medical procedures were postponed today, bringing the total number of postponements to 112 since Wednesday. Emergency and urgent surgeries will be accommodated today and through the weekend, using equipment sterilized at other sites.

The residue appeared following cleaning and sterilization of surgical equipment used in operating rooms and day procedures. After extensive investigation, it was learned the residue relates to an approved stainless steel polishing product routinely used in the cleaning and sterilization process. Dr. Karin Goodison, Medical Officer of Health for AHS South Zone, determined the residue poses no risk to patients following consultation with infection prevention control specialists.

“I am confident the residue does not and never did pose a risk to patients,” Dr. Goodison says. “Patient safety is always our uppermost concern. We exercised caution in our approach to this matter until we were certain there was no risk.”

The hospital will modify the use of the polishing agent.

Plans were put in place Thursday night to gradually ramp up the hospital’s medical device reprocessing (the process of cleaning and sterilizing equipment and instruments) department in preparation for the resumption of a normal surgical schedule Monday.

“We want to apologize again to our patients and their families, and assure them we are working with their physicians to expedite rescheduling their surgeries and procedures,” says Sean Chilton, Chief Zone Officer for AHS South Zone. There has been no increase in the rate of hospital-acquired infections during the past several weeks, he adds.

“We also want to say a huge thank you to our physicians; to our facilities, maintenance and engineering staff; and the team from the medical device reprocessing (MDR) department, who went above and beyond in their exceptional response to this situation. Many MDR staff have travelled to Medicine Hat, Calgary and Cardston to process equipment and instruments while we investigated the issue. The consistent high-quality work of our teams has meant a speedy response to this situation and helped to minimize the impact to our patients.”

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than four million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

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