

June 22, 2015

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# Spine surgery program improving lives in Wood Buffalo

*Nearly 25 patients have undergone procedures in Fort McMurray since December*

FORT McMURRAY – Local and area residents who require elective spine surgeries can now get the care they need without leaving the community.

The Northern Lights Regional Health Centre launched an elective spine surgery program last December and, to date, 24 patients had a procedure done at the local Alberta Health Services (AHS) facility. Fort McMurray joins Edmonton, Calgary and Grande Prairie as the only centres in the province to offer elective spine surgeries.

“This is something that we’ve been waiting to have for so long – it’s quite the improvement in services,” says spinal surgeon Dr. Andrei-Razvan Manolescu.

“One of the most gratifying feelings one can experience in our profession is following up on the post-operative progress of patients and hearing they’ve returned to a normal life. It’s almost overwhelming to see the impact that our program had in our community.”

Elective spine surgeries can ease pain, reduce numbness and restore motor control compromised by conditions such as degenerative spine disease, disc herniation, spinal stenosis (narrowing of the spinal canal) or degenerative scoliosis (curving of the spine in adults).

Richard Blais, 54, was the first patient in Fort McMurray to have spine surgery through the new program. Blais, who had suffered for years with pain caused by a herniated disc, is now back at work and able to play with his grandson without any pain.

Blais is grateful to Dr. Manolescu and his team for changing his life.

“He and his team gave me back my life; you know what I’m saying?” says Blais. “I know it’s their job but the way they helped me, it’s amazing. They gave me back my freedom and my life.”

Karen Espersen, operating room manager and operations team lead for the program, says the local program has also served patients from Red Deer, Vegreville, Lamont and Fort Saskatchewan. She looks forward to seeing the program grow and help more patients in the Wood Buffalo area and across the province.

“This is a fantastic new service for patients and we’ve worked hard to get to this point,” Espersen says. “It’s really been a tremendous team effort that brought together departments throughout the hospital. It is such a step ahead in providing access to additional, specialized services to our patients in the Wood Buffalo region.”

The Northern Lights Health Foundation contributed \$300,000, through community support, to purchase some of the specialized equipment needed to launch the program.

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“The Health Foundation is thrilled to have funded this much-needed equipment for the spinal surgery program at the Health Centre,” says Susanne Chaffey, Executive Director of the Northern Lights Health Foundation.

Adds Dr. Manolescu: “We have been very fortunate to have the support of AHS, the Northern Lights Regional Health Centre and our community. Thanks to them, we’ve been given the opportunity to establish a state-of-the-art, multidisciplinary, patient-centred spine service.”

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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