

July 8, 2010

## 1,400 more cataract surgeries to be performed *120 additional corneal transplants also added*

CALGARY/EDMONTON – 1,400 additional cataract surgeries and up to 120 corneal transplants (over and above more than 35,000 eye surgeries provincewide annually) will be performed in Edmonton and Calgary over the next several months as a result of contracts awarded today.

The surgeries, to be performed between now and mid-October, will help reduce wait lists for these procedures.

"With predictable 5-year funding for health care, we can add more surgeries and reduce wait times for several procedures, including cataracts, hip and knee replacements and cardiac surgeries," said Gene Zwozdesky, Minister of Health and Wellness. "We are taking immediate action with this second blitz to help Albertans in need."

AHS issued an Expression of Interest to non-hospital surgical facilities on May 20, with a closing date of June 3. Five responses were received in Edmonton; six in Calgary. Contracts have been awarded to all approved, accredited facilities that responded.

In Edmonton, 60 of these new cataract procedures will be done at each of the following facilities: Alberta Eye Centre Inc.; Alberta Surgical Centre Inc.; Eye Q Premium Laser; Gimbel Eye Surgical Centre – Edmonton; and VisionMed. An additional 100 cataract surgeries will be performed at the Royal Alexandra Hospital.

In Calgary, 200 cataract procedures will be done at each of the following facilities: Gimbel Eye Centre – Calgary; Holy Cross Surgical Services; Mitchell Surgi-Centre (moved to SAEC Surgical Inc. as of June 26); Rocky Mountain Surgery Centre and Surgical Centres Inc. Up to 40 additional corneal transplants will be performed at each of the following facilities: Holy Cross Surgical Services; Rocky Mountain Surgery Centre and Surgical Centres Inc., subject to donor tissue availability. (Up to 150 corneal transplants are already budgeted for Edmonton, subject to availability of donor tissue.)

"Adding surgical capacity in high-demand areas is a priority for AHS," said AHS President and Chief Executive Officer Dr. Stephen Duckett. "We will continue to address wait times for surgeries and other ophthalmological procedures as part of our long-term strategy to improve access and build capacity."

A previous blitz announced in February added about 900 more cataract surgeries over and above the 35,000 eye-related surgeries funded annually. The one-year RFP agreements signed with four ophthalmology surgical centres in March 2010, and publicly funded by the Government of Alberta, added a further 2,140 cataract surgeries. Those contracts remain in place and are not affected by today's announcement.

The total cost of the additional 1,400 cataract and 120 corneal transplant procedures is approximately \$2 million, including surgeons' fees, anesthetists' fees, lens' costs and other related costs and is covered by AHS' operating budget, approved last week.

In addition to Edmonton and Calgary, cataract and other ophthalmology procedures are performed throughout the province, including the following sites in 13 additional communities in southern and northern Alberta:

Chinook Regional Hospital (Lethbridge); Medicine Hat Regional Hospital; High River General Hospital; Lamont Health Care Centre; Red Deer Regional Hospital Centre; Wetaskiwin Hospital and Care Centre; Fort Saskatchewan Health Centre; WestView Health Centre (Stony Plain); Cold Lake Healthcare Centre; Peace River Community Health Centre; Queen Elizabeth II Hospital (Grande Prairie); Westlock Healthcare Centre; and Lloydminster Hospital.

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than 3.7 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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**For media inquiries:**

Media are advised that Minister Gene Zwozdesky will be available at McDougall Centre in Calgary at 2:30 p.m. this afternoon to provide comment.

Don Stewart  
AHS Communications  
403.943.1210  
403.471.4010 (cell)

Gene Zwozdesky  
Minister of Health and Wellness  
780.446.1144