COVID-19 Surgical Response – USU-WR Surgery

After review of DoD, MHS, NCR, WRNMMC and USUHS guidelines as well as consultations with both national surgical leaders and the American College of Surgeons, we have developed the following approach to address the COVID-19 pandemic. This response is focused on the role of surgeons, our response to surge capacity, the education of students and residents, and research activities.

- As surgeons, our primary role is delivering outstanding surgical care. As military surgeons, we also bring the expeditionary “mindset” that is adaptable to extraordinary circumstances. Additionally, we have a role to play above and beyond our typical surgical practice to include, providing critical care by General Surgeons, assisting in triage, learned from combat, and assisting in difficult resource distribution decisions, should circumstances dictate.

- As military surgeons, we are well versed in addressing surge capacity both when deployed, and here in the NCR. We will adopt a similar approach when dealing with this potential for large numbers of non-combat ‘casualties’ while maintaining the ability to remain a combat casualty care receiving platform. Therefore, we will:
  - Reduce the number of scheduled/elective cases to maintain the flexibility to continue medically necessary, time sensitive cases as needed and will follow patterns seen across the civilian sector. Patients needing cancer care, facing loss of function, treating infections and other procedures, in which progressive medical conditions cannot tolerate delays of several weeks, will be considered for operations. We will adjudicate both COVID associated risks to patients, resources, faculty and staff alongside the potential increased mortality and morbidity associated with delays of care.
  - In order to maintain the most flexible ‘surge capacity’ we will keep our Ambulatory Surgery Centers (ASC) open for routine cases for the foreseeable future. If needed, our inpatient facilities could divert OR staff and cases to these ASC’s, or vice versa in the event of a heavy load of COVID patients at the inpatient centers.
  - When there are questions or controversies whether or not a surgical procedure is elective, the time sensitivity and/or medical necessity is to be determined at the service chief level.
  - ICU, inpatient ward, PACU and ambulatory capacity, staff availability, and OR supply chain capacity, will be continuously assessed by perioperative leaders with the site-specific command. Classification of cases will be based on operative capacity (available, constrained, or none) as well as patient needs and adjusted based on the above assessment.
• While the clinical care mission is our priority, we much continue to train the next generation of surgeons as well as continue relevant research. As military officers and healthcare providers, medical students and residents on all clinical rotations will be treated just like any other member of the team and continue caring for our patients; however, for PUI and overtly COVID positive patients, the number of team members entering the room should be minimized per national guidelines. Regarding research, we will continue to advance the science using prudent precautions as indicated in our recent policy.

We ask that each member of the Department (clinical faculty, research faculty, technicians, support staff) remain flexible during this period. When in doubt, please look to our Departmental goals of providing complex surgical care, superior quality outcomes, and academic productivity as guides. As mentioned, our ability to adapt and overcome in caring for our nation’s heroes is no different with this challenge.

We also ask that all members of the surgical community recognize that these circumstances are both an extraordinary challenge but also a great opportunity. The challenge maybe severe but we know that you will rise to that challenge and deal with this extraordinary event. The opportunity is to observe and learn how to pivot ourselves and a hospital to deal with a new and present danger. We know that you will be ever mindful that caring for our service members and their families is a privilege and an honor. Our leadership team is available to address any questions.

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