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YUKON MEETS NATIONAL BENCHMARKS FOR LOCAL PROCEDURES

WHITEHORSE – Yukon is already meeting the wait times for services in four of the eight areas identified earlier this week by Provincial/Territorial Ministers of Health who have been working together to create benchmarks for the provision of medical and screening services since the First Ministers meeting in September 2004.

The benchmarks were released in Toronto by Ontario Health Minister George Smitherman on behalf of the provinces and territories.

“Only four of the eight procedures announced earlier today are performed in the territory,” Yukon Health Minister Brad Cathers said. “I am very pleased to say that our current wait times for these procedures are well within these new established benchmarks.”

The provinces and territories identified eight areas where they will initially work to reduce wait times for services. These services include radiation therapy to cancer patients, hip fracture fixation, hip replacement, knee replacements, cataract surgery for high risk patients, cardiac bypass surgery, breast cancer screening for women aged 50 to 69; and cervical cancer screening for women aged 18 to 69 every three years after two normal tests.

Only knee replacements, cataract surgery, mammography and cervical screening take place in the Yukon.

“Simple knee replacements are currently done in the Yukon, at eight per year. Early in the New Year, we will be adding the capacity to perform an additional four surgeries, while the national benchmark has been set at 26 weeks, in the Yukon, it is usually 16 to 20 weeks between the time the individual is referred to surgery until surgery takes place,” Cathers said. He cited the example of a patient seeing the specialist in April and being slated for surgery in September.

The benchmark for cataract surgery has been set at 16 weeks for patients who are at high risk. Currently the visiting ophthalmologist is in the Yukon every three months. A patient found to need surgery during one visit will usually be scheduled for surgery during the next visit, which is generally a 12- or 13-week wait.

Wait times for screening mammography is not considered to be an issue in the Yukon, with patients able to access mammography usually within six weeks of calling for a screening appointment. Similarly, cervical screening for women is considered good health care practice by Yukon physicians and is an insured service in the Yukon.

All the other services identified by the provinces and territories as priorities for wait time reductions are not performed in the Yukon.

“We expect Yukon will continue to benefit from its relationships with B.C. and Alberta and that our residents will continue to receive timely access to the medical care they require. Any benefits realized in those two provinces through wait time reductions will also improve services to Yukoners,” Cathers added.

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