



*Graham Regional  
Medical Center*

## Resumption of Routine Care

April 24, 2020

To: All Employees

From: Shane Kernell  
Chief Executive Officer

We have been closely monitoring the dynamic shifts of the COVID-19 pandemic in our community and have been working to prepare a thoughtful and measured approach to re-introduce non-COVID patient care services at Graham Regional Medical Center when the timing was appropriate to do so. With Governor Abbott's recent executive order modifying previous restrictions on surgeries and procedures, combined with data indicating that the growth rate of the number of people testing positive for COVID-19 has slowed and the number of COVID-related hospitalizations has plateaued, ***we have made the decision to resume non-emergent, clinically necessary elective procedures and surgeries at Graham Regional Medical Center beginning on Monday, April 27. Scheduling for these procedures can start immediately.***

This work is being done in accordance with [Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services \(CMS\) Recommendations](#) related to the re-opening of facilities to provide non-emergency, non-COVID-19 healthcare. Throughout this transition, we will continue to work closely with elected and public health officials to ensure we maintain capacity to care for COVID-19 patients within our facilities.

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As we begin to reopen services, we remain diligent in our fight against COVID-19 and thoughtful in our approach to returning to normal operations for the safety of our patients, physicians, workforce and the community. We want to make sure you, as well as our patients and their family members, are aware of all we are doing to keep everyone safe while delivering care of the highest quality. COVID-19 will be part of our operating environment for the foreseeable future. ***Understanding this reality, we need to adapt so that we can function effectively in a world that is COVID-safe, as opposed to COVID-free.*** Therefore, we are actively adapting our

systems and protocols to ensure that you, as well as our physicians and those we care for, are safe in that reality.

### **Maintaining Precautions**

We have taken numerous actions to provide the safest possible environment for our employees, physicians and patients in response to COVID-19. Our response plan has included multiple precautions, and it continues to evolve as the pandemic unfolds. These precautions, which remain in place throughout our organization to preserve a safe environment, include:

- Limited entrances/access into our hospitals and clinics
- Screening of our patients, physicians, staff and visitors
- Visitor restrictions in patient care areas
- Management of supplies to appropriately protect our caregivers and patients
- Working closely with local, state and national health officials to plan for potential scenarios as the pandemic evolves.

We also continue to stress effective preventive measures such as good hand hygiene and other self-care measures.

### **Universal Protections**

In addition to these precautions, as we relaunch services, one key component of our preparedness strategy is the establishment of universal protections—a new standard that promotes patient safety and confidence across all sites of care. With these universal precautions, you will see continued – and in some cases enhanced – screening, testing, masking, patient cohorting, patient flow procedures, as well as infection prevention protocols in our facilities.

Among the universal protections are precautions to protect operating room team members. We are implementing a COVID-19 Surgical Algorithm for Universal Protection, adapted from Stanford University, which describes institutional guidelines for precautions for operating room team members. The algorithm is based on urgency of operation, anticipated viral burden at the surgical site, opportunity for a procedure to aerosolize the virus, and the likelihood a patient could be infected based on symptoms and testing. ***The Stanford guidelines provide a strategy for who needs to be tested based on risk-stratification, as well as the appropriate level of PPE required. As we launch the reboot, GRMC will continue symptom and contact screening with PCR testing when indicated. We believe this will provide a level of comfort to our patients, physicians and staff. This may change over time based on the availability of testing supplies, the results of universal testing, as well as the ongoing prevalence of COVID-19 in the community.***

### **Personal Protective Equipment**

We continue to have adequate supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE) for patients, clinicians, caregivers, staff and visitors. We have implemented evidence-based and thoughtful procedures to help maintain appropriate PPE for all who enter our care facilities. Our supply chain continually works to track usage and demand so we can allocate PPE appropriately and preserve adequate inventory.

### **Patient Confidence**

Our goal is to serve the needs of our community confidently and safely. As we move forward, we are mindful of the concerns of our patients. They will likely have questions about their safety in respect to COVID-19, adequate segregation of patients and caregivers, as well as the ability to have family nearby. We will be notifying our patients and posting it to Graham Regional Medical Center's digital platforms to inform them that we have begun rescheduling surgeries and procedures, and outlining the steps we are taking to ensure their safety and protection, including enhanced entrance screenings, universal masking, use of PPE, facility cleaning, patient cohorting, patient flow, COVID-19 testing, etc.

### **Operational Efficiency**

Our organization is tasked with prudently managing resources as we relaunch our procedural areas. Just as COVID-19 has impacted the operations and financial condition of physician practices, the inability of our hospital to provide elective procedures has had a financial impact on our healthcare system. As we resume services, we will need to be good fiduciaries of our resources and ensure we are operating in a highly efficient and cost-effective manner. This includes developing efficiencies in our scheduling processes to ensure our ORs and procedural areas are fully productive, and staffing is optimized. As such, scheduling flexibility may initially be limited. Details on this will be provided to you.

### **Visitor Policies**

In conjunction with resuming these procedures and surgeries, effective Monday, April 27:

- Visiting hours will be restricted to 6am–5pm. Only one adult per patient is allowed in the building at a time during these hours.
- All visitors must be 18 years of age or older.
- One person may remain overnight in these services only:
  - Pediatrics
  - Patient Advocates Pre/Post Surgery
  - End of Life

We will continue to screen everyone entering our facilities. If a visitor doesn't pass the entrance screening, they are not allowed in the facility.

No students are currently allowed in our facilities.

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Over the next few days, we will be ramping up our scheduling, insurance verification, supply and equipment readiness, anesthesia support, staffing and other related support functions to ensure the smooth resumption of surgery on Monday.

Because of your great care, Graham Regional Medical Center is uniquely positioned to safely proceed with these elective services, given our vigilant practices, available resources and expertise. As we resume services, we will regularly evaluate our best practices to assess when and if procedural adjustments are necessary. Our willingness to adapt is a direct reflection of our commitment to providing the highest-caliber care.

Thank you for your steadfast commitment to caring for and serving our community. We value the confidence you and our patients have in us, and we hold ourselves accountable to reinforcing that confidence in the days ahead.