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AMA PROPOSES STEPS FOR RESUMPTION OF ELECTIVE SURGERY

The AMA has been in contact with the Federal Government to propose steps needed for the resumption of elective surgery – initially for low-risk, high-patient-benefit procedures.

Elective surgery in Australia was suspended in Australia in March to free up beds and health workers to cater for an anticipated surge in COVID-19 patients, and to save scarce personal protective equipment (PPE) such as masks, gowns, and gloves.

AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said today that doctors should be supported to make clinical decisions about which surgeries can proceed in the best interests of patient and clinician wellbeing and safety.

Dr Bartone said that National Cabinet should adopt a phased timetable to restart some elective surgery providing that, preparing for surgery, there is sufficient Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for all clinicians, and that any surgeries that involve a high risk of COVID transmission are avoided.

“It is important for patients that we re-activate access to private hospital care that is deemed safe, while at the same time maintaining Australia’s strong and successful management of COVID-19,” Dr Bartone said.

“The AMA has strongly supported the swift response taken by the Government to the COVID-19 threat, and we wish to see a continuation of Australia’s successful results to date.

“Indeed, it is due to the success of the Government’s response to COVID-19 that we now see available capacity in both our public and private hospital systems.

“The rationale to cautiously and gradually restart elective surgery authorised by doctors is to assure patient wellbeing. Many elective surgeries are for health conditions that will only worsen over time.

“A gradual loosening of restrictions is also consistent with the Government’s and the AMA’s view that patients should not ignore existing health concerns, and seek medical care when needed.

“Restarting some elective surgery in a responsible way also ensures that our facilities do not lay idle, and reduces patient wait times.

“We support a graduated restart of all Category 2 elective surgeries across all specialties, in addition to the current Category 1. Following an assessment of a gradual restart, where practicable, Category 3 procedures could then be considered.

“Doctors should be authorised to make decisions about what surgeries can proceed in the best interests of patients and clinicians.

“The AMA supports treatment proceeding as determined by doctors. It would be logical to restart procedures at low risk of spreading COVID-19 and of high benefit to the patient, and this would include IVF treatments.”

Dr Bartone said that one of the determining factors in maximising the operation of the private hospital system – be it for work directed by State Governments or private elective surgery work - will be the adequate supply of PPE.

“Hospitals must have an adequate supply of PPE for all medical and hospital staff, and this is a necessary precursor before any surgeries are undertaken,” Dr Bartone said.

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