

MEDIA RELEASE

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New \$8.1 m Toowoomba Hospital theatre set to improve patient care

Work on a seventh general operating theatre at Toowoomba Hospital is set to start later this year with an \$8.1 million funding commitment from the Darling Downs Hospital and Health Board.

Board Chair Mr Mike Horan AM said the significant infrastructure upgrade to improve patient care would be funded through an operational budget surplus.

“The Board has recognised the importance of establishing an extra theatre to help keep up with increasing demand for surgical services,” Mr Horan said.

“The hard work of staff has meant part of the \$20.1 million budget surplus we recorded in 2014-15 can be used to reinvest in establishing this extra theatre.

“Even with the commissioning of two refurbished endoscopy suites last year which increased operating capacity, the extra general theatre will help ensure patients continue to receive the surgery they need within the recommended timeframe.

“We are very proud that we have maintained the national elective surgery target of no one waiting longer than clinically recommended since December 2014, but we need to act now to provide the supporting infrastructure for our doctors, nurses and other clinical and support staff to continue their great work.”

He said the six general theatres at Toowoomba Hospital currently ran at 85 to 90 per cent capacity, including flexibility to cover emergencies, which left little room for growth both in terms of potential extra surgical services or increased demand for current procedures.

“When the Emma Webb Building was opened in 1998, the operating suite was commissioned with an extra space that could be refurbished to add another operating theatre.

“So far we have managed to increase the number of patients receiving treatment through a number of measures including weekend surgery lists, however this is not sustainable in the longer term.”

Minister for Health and Ambulance Services Cameron Dick said the extra theatre would help meet increasing demand for surgery.

“Last year Toowoomba Hospital was averaging an extra 200 elective surgeries a month than what it was in 2012, and that’s meant additional strain on resources,” he said.

“Combining this with the fact about 1000 extra patients have shifted from the outpatient waiting list to the elective surgery list in the past two years, an additional general operating theatre is clearly a logical investment.

“It’s pleasing to see the Darling Downs Hospital and Health Board making strong capital investment decisions in the Toowoomba region.

“This is a prime example of why hospital and health boards exist. These boards are well-placed to determine how best to prioritise the funding their service is allocated, including capital expenditure.

“This theatre will turbocharge this hospital’s ability to ensure its patients are receiving the surgery they need sooner, and I have no doubt it will be a well-utilised and welcome addition for the Toowoomba community.”

Toowoomba Hospital has been one of the best performers in the state in terms of reducing the waiting list for specialist outpatients’ appointments, going from a peak of 12,800 in 2013 to achieving no one waiting longer than recommended in December 2015.

Last year, 10,047 surgeries were performed at Toowoomba Hospital including 6786 elective procedures and 3261 emergency surgeries.

Toowoomba Hospital’s Director of Surgery Dr Eric Donaldson and Director of Orthopaedics Dr Leo Zeller both welcomed the Board’s announcement.

“The new theatre has been designed in consultation with the surgical teams and will include a number of features to make a positive difference to patient care,” Dr Donaldson said.

“Being able to perform more surgery in-house will improve efficiency so more patients can receive the timely care they need.

“The improvements go much further than a new operating theatre and include a new central waiting area, reception, additional consultation rooms and new patient amenities.

“Patient flow will also be improved with a new pre-operation holding area, larger recovery areas in the theatre and day hospital areas including extra paediatric recovery spaces, and a new patient discharge lounge.

“Staff will also welcome the expansion of the sterile store room and refurbishment of staff facilities.

“On behalf of the surgical teams, I thank the Board for its commitment to providing this valuable upgrade.”

Construction tenders will be called in mid-2016 with work expected to start in the second half of the year.

The redevelopment will be delivered in stages, with final completion expected in late 2017.

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MEDIA: Contact Darling Downs Hospital and Health Service Media Team 4699 8547, 0438 702 328 or DDHHS_media@health.qld.gov.au