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AHS - Chinook Health Expands Endoscopy Program *Interim Strategy Will Help to Address Waitlists*

Coaldale... Alberta Health Services-Chinook Health will begin conducting screening colonoscopies at the Coaldale Health Centre Nov. 12th following renovations to that facility. An open house will be held Wednesday, Nov. 5th from 2 to 4 p.m.

This is a temporary location for the region's expanded Endoscopy Program and will allow physicians and surgeons to address waitlists for screening colonoscopies at Chinook Regional Hospital. In Southern Alberta, endoscopy procedures are also done in the Crowsnest Pass, Pincher Creek, Taber, and Cardston.

Dr. Tony Gomes, a Lethbridge surgeon who will be participating in the expanded program, says colorectal cancer is a significant health issue in Alberta.

"Colorectal screening is vital to the early detection of some cancers," he says. "Colonoscopy is the most accurate screening tool available to us."

According to the new screening guidelines released by the Alberta Cancer Board, people aged 50 to 74 should be regularly screened for colorectal cancer.

Right now, the physical space to increase endoscopy procedures at Chinook Regional Hospital doesn't exist, says Janet Lapins, Vice President, Acute Care. The region has plans to expand the Day Procedures area but can't complete that work until after the Cancer Centre moves from its current space into renovated space in the south wing, likely in 2010.

"Surgeons and gastroenterologists are sufficiently concerned about their wait lists and agreed about a year ago to look at a temporary location close to Lethbridge."

Coaldale, because of its proximity to Chinook Regional Hospital, will allow physicians to maintain their offices and other clinical responsibilities; it also had the necessary space in two unused operating rooms which have been converted to endoscopy suites.

Only low-risk endoscopy patients will be considered for screening at the Coaldale site; high-risk individuals will continue to be scheduled for the Chinook Regional Hospital site.

The Coaldale Endoscopy Program will function three days a week. As many as 2,700 additional procedures could be completed annually which would have a significant impact on waitlists.

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