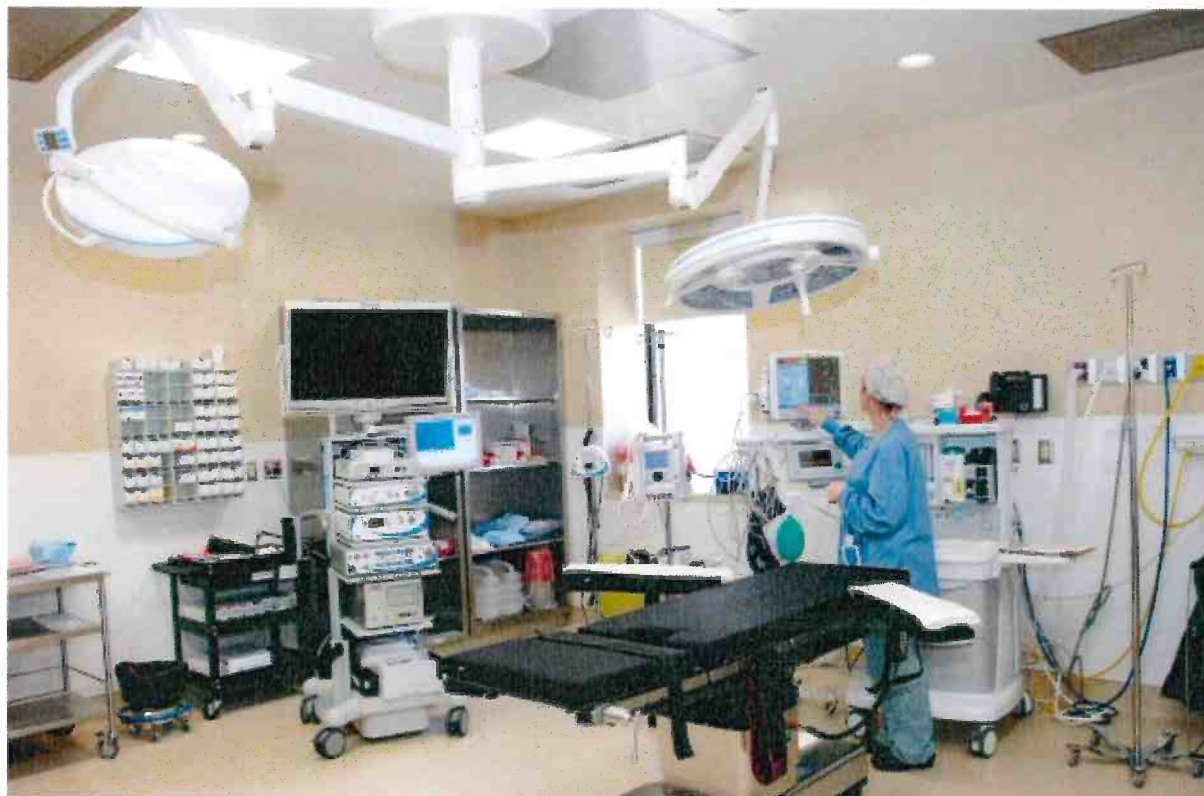


Plains' future may be in private sector | Video

BY ASHLEY MARTIN, LEADER-POST MAY 27, 2015



The future of the Plains Surgery and Outpatient Care Centre may fall on the private sector, said Health Minister Dustin Duncan. Photograph by: Bryan Schlosser, Regina Leader-Post

REGINA — Don't expect the provincial government to pony up for the Plains Surgery and Outpatient Care Centre.

Even though Health Minister Dustin Duncan "wouldn't say it's off the table," it's unlikely the centre announced by Premier Brad Wall in June 2012 will receive public money if it ever does take shape.

"We think that there may be a different way to do it," Duncan said Tuesday. "I could see the concept moving forward, but not necessarily being driven by the public sector; perhaps by the private sector."

When the Plains was announced, it was to provide outpatient services like surgeries and scans in order to ease the burden on Regina's two hospitals.

But increasingly since 2011, the province has paid private companies to provide various public health services. These now include day surgeries, CT scans and MRIs.

"We've seen some great success in that," said Duncan.

Surgical Centres Inc. is on contract through November 2017 to provide at least 5,650 surgeries per year for the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region (RQHR); RQHR saw 26,613 surgeries in 2013-14.

"We've seen so much success using the private sector in delivering a lot of our services that there may be a point where we will see the co-location of some of these services, but I think where we're at in a different place right now than we were before," said Duncan. "Before it was really going to be the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region owning and operating the Plains centre.

"There may be an opportunity for something like the Plains centre to continue, to move forward in the future, but I don't think it necessarily has to be the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region to do it."

Duncan discussed the Plains in a scrum to reiterate the province's successes in reducing surgical wait times, given its surgical initiative that wrapped up two months ago. It was originally a four-year initiative to end in 2014, but was extended a year.

The government has spent nearly \$300 million in five years to reduce surgical wait times to a three-month maximum.

As of March 31, it had not reached its target in three health regions.

Prince Albert Parkland was close, with 20 people having waited longer than three months.

In RQHR, 443 people had waited longer than three months; in Saskatoon, 1,215.

Comparably, a year ago RQHR had 2,314 people waiting longer than three months; in Saskatoon, 1,469.

"Our goal is to keep progressing toward that three months and then stabilize it when we do get to the three months," said Duncan. The government has no plans for a more ambitious goal.

Last week, RQHR confirmed it would be closing eight short-stay surgical beds on June 29. Those beds are used about 60- to 70-per-cent of the time.

Four beds will be relocated to another unit; the other four will be temporarily closed.

"They're not meeting their target" for wait times, said NDP health critic Danielle Chartier, "so why would you close surgical capacity?"

The beds can accommodate 1,000 surgeries per year, she said.

"If you are making progress, why would you want to go the opposite direction?" said Chartier.

Duncan said cutting these beds is "actually good news" because it's a sign of the surgical initiative's success.

"We're really getting through that backlog of people, so what we're going to start seeing is actually a lowering in the number of surgeries that we need to do over the next number of years," said Duncan.

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