Elective procedures stopped at hospitals as patient load increases

**Rei Kurohi**

Elective medical procedures have been completely stopped at hospitals as the healthcare system is under increasing strain from large numbers of Covid-19 patients.

From surgery to clinic appointments, anything that is elective has been postponed, Professor Dale Fisher of the National University Hospital said yesterday.

But there has also been a heavy focus on maintaining essential services, so patients who need emergency care will continue to be treated, he added. For example, treatments for cancer and cardiac conditions continue, but some cancer clinics have “gone virtual”.

Liver transplants are also continuing, but fewer of them are being done, he noted. Kidney transplants have been stopped as such operations are seen as elective, given that patients can survive with dialysis.

Prof Fisher said: “Elective surgery – probably hernia repairs, maybe some orthopaedic work – these types of things are clearly being saved for another day.”

About 4,200 Covid-19 patients are still warded at various hospitals in Singapore, while another 5,000 who are clinically well but continue to test positive for the virus are being cared for at community isolation facilities.

Singapore has about 12,000 beds in its acute hospitals.

Prof Fisher said there is no doubt that the hospital systems are strained, and many hospital workers are now also providing services at affected foreign worker dormitories.

The National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID), which usually accommodates 330 beds, can expand to accommodate over 500 beds during outbreaks. But it has now exhausted its capacity.

The centre was built to deal with an outbreak on the scale of the severe acute respiratory syndrome outbreak (Sars) in 2003, said NCID director Leo Yee Sin.

But Covid-19 has gone beyond the Sars scale, she said.

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