

Hospitals across the state get the green light from the governor to move

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Healdsburg District Hospital among those ready to resume scheduling needed surgeries



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Orthopedic surgeon Kevin Howe, MD, center, physician assistant Natalie Carlberg, left, and scrub technician Gordon Henry, right, perform a hip replacement surgery on Lee Olibas at Santa Rosa Memorial Hospital on Friday, July 18, 2014. (Conner Jay/The Press Democrat)

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Hospitals today were the beneficiaries of the first sign that California is beginning to reopen its economy, when Gov. Gavin Newsom said during his daily noon conference that surgeries considered essential can resume.

“We are in a position today to begin to pull back and lean in by beginning to schedule surgeries once again,” Newsom said. “We will be very thoughtful and judicious about

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Dr. Joseph Tito, chief of surgery at Healdsburg District Hospital, said in a statement he has established a surgical-review committee to evaluate which nonemergency, but necessary, surgeries will get first priority.

"We have identified cases in our backlog that have high risk factors if we prolong the delay in treatment, and we have begun scheduling them for this week," Tito said. "Important issues to consider are increasing levels of pain, loss of ability to ambulate and progression of disease, among others."

Just last week, during a virtual meeting of the North Sonoma County Healthcare District board, Richard Baland, the hospital's interim CFO, said total losses for March are expected to be \$1.74 million, according to The Press Democrat. Hospital officials had budgeted a \$464,700 monthly loss.

Normally Healdsburg Hospital's revenues from surgeries would offset those losses, but outpatient revenue is down by 65%, Baland said.

Joseph Harrington, CEO of the Healdsburg hospital, expressed relief at today's news.

"This is an important service to patients who need it most and initiates a much-needed revenue stream back into the hospital," Harrington said in an email.

"Reopening urgent but nonemergency services to those in the greatest need of care, allows us to provide relief from severe pain and avoid potentially debilitating issues down the road."

Newsom said during his press briefing that surgeries defined as essential include operations to repair heart disease and the removal of tumors.

"We are not opening to traditional cosmetic surgeries though there's a cosmetic component to any major surgery and that should be afforded under a scheduled surgery," Newsom said in response to a reporter's question, adding cosmetic-type surgeries don't fall under prioritized guidance. "That's not one of the authorizations for scheduled surgery we're putting out today."

Statewide, more than half of the hospitals are expected to report net losses before the pandemic is over, Jan Emerson-Shea, a spokeswoman for the California Hospital Association, told The Press Democrat last week.

"We do know, however, that there will be long-term financial devastation to California's health care system as a result of the pandemic," she said.

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