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Welcome to the winter edition of The Blade. The year 2020 will not soon be forgotten in the Department of Surgery. It has been a year of transition and adaptation. We must begin by thanking Dr. Sean Grondin, Department Head, and Shelly Bohn, Department Manager, for their devotion and leadership this past year, especially during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Grondin was extremely productive during his term. His strong core values of transparency and fairness, along with a strong work ethic, fueled his ability to accomplish numerous changes. Under his watch, there were reviews of the Office of Surgical Research, Office of Surgical Education, and Office of Surgical Fellowship. He also established a new program, the Office of Surgical Quality. He was a strong advocate for our members, and we are extremely grateful for his work in communicating with Alberta Health Services and Alberta Health. We wish him the best in his two new leadership roles as Regent with the American College of Surgeons and President of the Society of Thoracic Surgeons, both impressive, prestigious positions (be sure to read the goodbye message from him in the pages ahead). We are also grateful for the extensive work Shelly Bohn did as the Department Manager. I’m not sure we have ever seen so many excel files with so many colours that were so well organized! We will miss you both.

We have since welcomed Michelle Jeong as the new Department Manager. Michelle brings more than fifteen years of experience in healthcare, including roles in medicine/surgery, emergency, critical care, and mental health, from children and adolescent to geriatric population groups. We look forward to working with Michelle, so please join us in welcoming her to the department.

With change (and there has been a lot of change!) comes opportunity. The COVID pandemic has made us review our surgical triage criteria and disaster plans, though we hope to never implement these most extreme measures. You can read accounts of how COVID has affected each of our five Calgary hospitals from our Site Chiefs in this issue of The Blade. In combination with the Executive Directors of Surgical Services at each hospital, our Site Chiefs did an amazing job during the first wave of the pandemic, and they continue their tireless work each week as we deal with the second wave.

We held our Department of Surgery retreat in Kananaskis just before the start of the pandemic. In this beautiful mountain setting, we used an innovative group process called Open Space Technology. It works well for inherently complex issues that require diverse
perspectives. The premise of the three-day retreat was Patient-Centered care. Three core themes emerged:

1. Changes to clinical practice and outcomes
2. Department resources
3. Physician engagement and well-being

Leaders in the department had a chance to share their views in these areas, and action plans were developed. One of the large provincial projects underway is a review of onsite arrangements and discussion around overhead finances. In this issue of the Blade, you can read about some key people who will help us in these areas: Dr. Paul McBeth, our Facilities Resource Allocation Lead, and Megan Fordham, one of our new Administrative Services Managers.

One of the best parts of working in this department is the hiring of new surgeons. Our new faculty are the lifeblood of the future of the department, and you will have an opportunity to read about them in the pages ahead. In addition, you will see a list of our members who have taken on new leadership positions. Dr. Artan Reso has stepped in as interim Deputy Department head for Clinical Services and Innovation. We have also been fortunate to name Dr. Francis Sutherland as the new Deputy Department Head of Surgical Access and Improvement. The department cannot run without your contributions, so thank you for stepping up to join our leadership team and helping us to face the challenges ahead. We would also like to thank all of the outgoing leaders as well as the surgeons who have retired this past year. We thank you for your years of service, and even more importantly, your patients thank you. Enjoy your retirement, knowing your work has improved the overall health of the Calgary population.

As department leadership, we are here to continue the day-to-day work of the department and to support you, the members. The search for a new Department Head is underway, and we hope it will be completed by the first part of 2021. We are sure that our next leader will take the learnings from the Kananaskis retreat, in addition to expanding on the work of Dr. Grondin, to advance our department as part of the Cumming School of Medicine and Alberta Health Services. We will all continue to work towards a better tomorrow.

Sincerely

Dr. Elijah Dixon, Interim Department Head
Dr. Frankie Fraulin, Deputy Department Head – Governance and Physician Services
GOODBYE FROM DR. GRONDIN

Dear Colleagues,

By the time you read this article, I will have stepped down as the Head of the Department of Surgery (DoS), and the search for my replacement will be well underway. It has been my absolute honour and privilege to work with all of you as we have managed the complex issues facing our surgical environment. Although I have full confidence that the interim DoS leadership will provide exemplary support for all of the sites, sections, and department members, I am aware that the road ahead will be challenging. Issues arising from the Alberta Surgical Initiative and the Covid Response plan, the change in clinical and leadership stipends, and the multiple initiatives proposed in the Ernest & Young report will need to be carefully prioritized and managed with a sound implementation strategy. I encourage all surgeons to attend DoS business meetings and regularly read the DoS email newsletter to stay informed on the latest issues potentially affecting your practice and patient care. Please also take the time to provide constructive feedback to DoS leaders as well as senior Alberta Health Services and Cumming School of Medicine leaders to help guide the planning and implementation of these local and provincial initiatives as we all continue to advocate for high-quality patient care.

The last four and a half years have been deeply rewarding and a high point in my professional career. I am proud of the work we have done and sincerely appreciated the opportunity to represent and advocate for the DoS. Thank you for your support, and I wish you and your families all the best in 2021.

Sincerely yours,

Sean C. Grondin MD MPH FRCSC FACS
Professor of Surgery
Cumming School of Medicine, University of Calgary
The mission of the Office of Surgical Research (OSR) is to cultivate and enhance research initiatives within the Department of Surgery (DoS). Our objectives are to support faculty and trainee research projects, provide core biostatistical support, foster relationships with the Cumming School of Medicine research institutes, and support our members striving for competitive external funding opportunities. Governance of the OSR is guided by valuable input and expertise from members of the OSR working group — volunteer DoS members representing the breadth of clinical sections within our department. The OSR working group meets quarterly to plan and implement multiple directives from our portfolio, including funding opportunities, research workshops, statistical support, furthering research capacity within the DoS, and planning our annual Surgeons’ Day.

Grants and Awards
In the 2019-2020 fiscal year, $320,000 from the OSR budget was awarded to members of the DoS to support faculty, research projects, and research infrastructure. These awards include support to individual sections, targeted support of early-career surgeon-scientists, open access publication support, and the Sharpest Knife competition. In response to the unique surgical challenges associated with COVID-19, the OSR awarded two research grants for COVID-19 surgical research. The recipients were Dr. Andrew Kirkpatrick (Tele-Mentored Self-Administered Lung Ultrasound Examination in COVID-19 Infected Patients) and Dr. Derrick Randall (Evaluating the Community Prevalence of SARS-CoV-2 Infection in Persons Undergoing High-Risk Procedures). The OSR has just opened a new multi-year funding competition, the Pathway to Success Program, designed to support DoS research initiatives pursuing competitive external funding. The deadline for applications is March 8, 2021.

Statistical Support
A key deliverable of the OSR is to provide biostatistical support for DoS research initiatives. In 2018, a dedicated biostatistician was added to the OSR with 50 statistical projects completed since that time. Projects support resident, fellow, and faculty research across the spectrum of study design, grant applications, and data analysis.

We are pleased to announce the recent hiring of Dr. Golpira Elmi Assadzadeh, PhD, to this position. Golpira brings a tremendous wealth of statistical expertise to the position and is excited to work with our members. Biostatistical support can be accessed via the OSR page on the DoS website.

Surgeons Day
Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Surgeons’ Day 2020 was cancelled. Surgeons’ Day 2021 has been scheduled for Friday, June 4, 2021, and will proceed as either an in-person or virtual event. We are excited and looking forward to showcasing the terrific surgical research from our faculty and trainees over the past two years.

For questions regarding the OSR, our deliverables, or general inquiries about navigating surgical research at the University of Calgary, please contact Dr. Michael Monument (mjmonume@ucalgary.ca) or visit our website (cumming.ucalgary.ca/departments/surgery/research), which includes updated links and reference documents.
One of the challenges identified early on was the disruption of supply chains due to the pandemic. Parts needed to build the ventilators could not be sourced through regular channels, and that’s when local companies stepped in. Within weeks, there was a working prototype built with off-the-shelf valves normally used in the oil and gas industry. “What really impressed me the most about this project was the amount of support from the community, how people really stepped up and put countless hours into the project to simply make it happen,” shares McBeth.

Another challenge was the level of uncertainty and the need to adapt. All of the meetings were done virtually, which was an entirely different way of communicating and interacting with people for this type of project. “Normally, the team would get together with a big whiteboard to draw out ideas,” says McBeth. “This was completely different. And the pace with which things moved was incredibly fast.” When they finally met in person to test the prototype, everything came together. “It was remarkable to see how we all adapted to the limitation of not meeting in person and then coming up with a working prototype on our first attempt.”

One of the Calgary groups Dr. McBeth worked with, the Bertie 1.0 Project by Exergy Solutions Inc., has taken their ventilator from concept, design, and prototype to being evaluated and approved by Health Canada. Two hundred ventilators were manufactured and delivered to AHS by early June 2020, and they are ready to go when or if needed. “It was perceived as a race against time when we saw what happened in Italy when they ran out of ventilators,” says McBeth.
“Fortunately, we didn’t need the ventilators during the first wave, but we now have an insurance policy in case we do.” The ventilators also have the potential for use after the pandemic. They can be adapted for use in remote hospitals or deployed to underserved areas, in this country or abroad.

“Thinking back … the response from the community was overwhelming. It’s what impressed me most about this project. We have such an incredible talent pool here in Alberta,” shares McBeth.

When not in the middle of a pandemic, Dr. McBeth is busy working on other projects that blend his clinical and engineering background. Projects like teleTraumaDoc, a remote ultrasound technology developed with fellow trauma surgeon Dr. Andrew Kirkpatrick. He is also working on an Artificial Intelligence project with University of Calgary researchers that uses physiologic data to predict how sick a trauma patient is before they arrive at the hospital. This is done through wearable devices used by STARS crews. Both projects could help improve outcomes for trauma patients by diagnosing fatal injuries and allowing emergency teams to prepare before a patient even reaches the hospital. Dr. McBeth is also busy working with the Canadian Space Agency in an advisory capacity on the Deep Space Health Care committee.

“My involvement in the ventilator project is something I will cherish for a long time. I hope we are able to embrace projects like this in the future, even outside the pandemic. There are many talented individuals in our community that we should be supporting to solve real-world problems,” shares Dr. McBeth.
WHAT WE’VE LEARNED DURING COVID-19

ROCKYVIEW GENERAL HOSPITAL
Dr. Greg Kozak, Site Chief

We learned many things during the first wave of the pandemic. We needed to think ahead, be prepared, and ensure a plan was in place for different scenarios. Scenarios such as how to fairly address surgical service issues when surgeons or anesthetists were ill or there were staffing issues. And even during a pandemic, some activities still need to move forward, such as cancer surgeries. We needed to ensure patients, staff, and surgeons were prepared and supported to continue what needed to be done. We have all been taxed throughout these challenging times, and we know this is a marathon and not a sprint. We need to support one another whenever and wherever possible.

... we couldn’t have made it through the first wave without our dedicated team members going the extra mile.

SOUTH HEALTH CAMPUS
Dr. Marcia Clark, Site Chief

During the first wave of COVID-19, there was uncertainty, fear, and doubt, and I learned and lived important lessons. It was important to show up, be present, and be patient for the surgeons and the broader group of staff and healthcare professionals. Things were changing rapidly, and it was critical to communicate what I was learning every day. Sending emails, talking in the halls, and calling team members was important to stay connected. I couldn’t be at every meeting or lead every task, and people stepped up in incredible ways. In partnership with our Anesthesia providers, we worked together to keep the OR suites running. Throughout this challenging time, I learned the importance of a leader showing hope, appreciation, and gratitude, and how we couldn’t have made it through the first wave without our dedicated team members going the extra mile.
DEPARTMENT OF SURGERY

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FOOTHILLS MEDICAL CENTRE
Dr. Donald Buie, Site Chief

During the initial wave, recommendations and guidelines regarding COVID-19 precautions evolved very rapidly, sometimes within a matter of hours. New policies and flow charts were developed literally on the fly. Over a two-day period, elective surgery was postponed, reducing 30 operating theatres down to an essential 11, thereby increasing hospital capacity for COVID-19 admissions. Virtually all of our 700 staff members were exposed to a practical session on COVID-19 precautions in the OR, which resulted in no work-related transmission from patients to staff. The degree of cooperation between nurses, anesthesia, respiratory therapy, surgeons, support staff, and administration during this intense time period was exceptional. The impossible was made possible through collaboration and a dedicated collective effort. The impossible was made possible through collaboration and a dedicated collective effort.

ALBERTA CHILDREN’S HOSPITAL
Dr. Paul Beaudry, Site Chief

During the first wave of the pandemic, one of the critical things we learned was to better understand the importance and value of different urgent and elective pediatric surgery procedures. Although pCATS codes give some guidance, the demand for OR time exceeds the supply even when we are at full capacity. As such, we need to know how to best use OR resources to deliver the best care for pediatric surgery patients. In addition, we learned that maintaining some flexibility of OR resources in the form of daily urgent time allowed us to more efficiently direct OR time to where it was more urgently needed. Though this has been a challenging time, our surgeons and staff have shown incredible teamwork. They have come together to support one another, our patients, and their families.

PETER LOUGHEED CENTRE
Dr. John Heine, Site Chief

My experience at the Peter Lougheed Centre (PLC) during the first wave of the pandemic has demonstrated that through strong communication and teamwork, we can respond to very challenging situations. Our Site Chiefs and Unit Managers met daily to review and refine our action plan and determine our response to staff concerns. We interacted frequently and effectively with the other Site Leads. Surgeons and anaesthesiologists jumped on board to volunteer for redeployment. All staff - MDRD, unit clerks, housekeeping, nursing attendants, and nurses - showed up for work every day, when not symptomatic, to allow the OR to continue to do emergent, urgent, and oncology cases. We faced uncertainty and unprecedented challenges, but through it all, the teamwork and dedication shown by everyone at PLC must be commended.
When a family member became ill, Megan Fordham spent many hours at the hospital, and that’s when she became curious about a career in healthcare. In fact, she was curious enough to take the Unit Clerk Program at Lethbridge College, and it was a decision that launched a 10-year career with AHS. “Looking back, that one semester really changed my life and the trajectory of my career, and I’m so grateful that it did,” says Megan.

Since that time, Megan has worked as a Unit Clerk for various inpatient and outpatient units and as an Administrative Assistant to several surgeons. She started with the Department of Surgery in 2014. After accepting a role as an Admin Site Team Lead, her current position as an Administrative Services Manager was a natural progression. “I recognized that I wanted to help my peers and help solve problems. I’ve always been that way, even when I was younger and worked as a restaurant manager or helped my parents with the farm, I naturally went in that direction,” shares Megan.

As one of two Administrative Managers for the department, Megan oversees more than 50 administrative staff at the Alberta Children’s Hospital, South Health Campus, Peter Lougheed Centre, and Rockyview General Hospital. She is responsible for managing human resources, space, and equipment needs across the four sites. Recently, she also began managing the Clinical Surgical and Physician Assistant Program, which includes 39 staff. “I’ve tried to learn as much as I can from everyone … people have been amazing, and I really appreciate the mentorship and support I have received,” says Megan. “Starting this role in the middle of the pandemic has definitely presented challenges, but it also helped me showcase my problem-solving skills.”

Though Megan spent most of her life in Alberta and grew up on a farm just outside of Lethbridge, she was actually born in Australia and moved to Canada when she was two years old. Her parents are farmers, and her mother’s family had a farm near Nobleford, Alberta. “My dad’s always been adventurous. He travelled a lot and was willing to come to Canada to try farming here,” says Megan.

“Starting this role in the middle of the pandemic has definitely presented challenges, but it also helped me showcase my problem-solving skills.”
Megan caught her father’s love of travel at an early age, and when she was only 15, she moved to Australia to attend an all-girls boarding school for one year. “When I was 13, my dad asked me if I wanted to spend grade 10 in Australia, and I jumped at the opportunity,” shares Megan. They spent the next two years organizing the trip. “When I think back, it was an amazing experience, and I made some great friendships.” She returned to Alberta to finish high school but travelled back to Australia after graduation and spent a year working and travelling through the country.

Since that time, Megan has pursued other adventures and travelled through South America, Europe, and Southeast Asia, including Taiwan, where she taught English for six months. Her parents moved back to Australia to be closer to their family 15 years ago, and Megan, along with her husband and children, tries to visit whenever possible.

When not dreaming of travelling, Megan is working on her Bachelor of Management from Athabasca University, spending time with her family, and attending sporting events. Winters are spent at the rink watching her son and daughter play hockey, and summers are spent outdoors hiking and camping.

DID YOU KNOW?

MEGAN CAN DRIVE A COMBINE
MEGAN RAN HER FIRST HALF MARATHON IN 2020
WELCOME TO NEW FACULTY

Dr. Tito Daodu
Clinical Assistant Professor, Pediatric Surgery

Dr. Tito Daodu is a Clinical Assistant Professor in pediatric surgery at the Alberta Children’s Hospital. Dr. Daodu completed medical school at the University of Manitoba, followed by residency and fellowship training at the University of Calgary. She is currently completing a Masters in Public Health at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Born in Nigeria, Dr. Daodu is passionate about global surgery and improving access to surgery for at-risk populations in Canada and worldwide. She is actively involved in global and public health research with a focus on improving surgical outcomes, accessibility, and equity. Dr. Daodu was named one of Avenue Magazine’s Top 40 under 40 in 2019.

Dr. Nathan Evaniew
Clinical Assistant Professor, Orthopedic Surgery

Dr. Nathan Evaniew is an orthopedic spine surgeon at Foothills Medical Centre. Dr. Evaniew completed medical school at the University of Calgary, followed by a residency in orthopedic surgery and PhD in Clinical Epidemiology and Biostatistics at McMaster University. In addition, he completed combined orthopedic and neurosurgical spine surgery fellowships at the University of British Columbia and the University of Calgary. Dr. Evaniew’s clinical practice includes the breadth of traumatic, degenerative, neoplastic, and deformity referrals common to a tertiary care center. His research focuses on improving the lives of patients with spinal disorders via the paradigm of evidence-based medicine.

Dr. Benjamin Hughes
Clinical Lecturer, Dentistry and Oral Health

Dr. Benjamin Hughes was born and raised in Medicine Hat, Alberta. He earned a Bachelor of Medical Sciences and a Doctor of Dental Surgery while attending the University of Alberta. In addition, he completed specialty training in pediatric dentistry at Bon Secours St. Mary’s Hospital in Richmond, Virginia. He recently joined the dental team at the Alberta Children’s Hospital as a staff dentist.

Dr. Sandeep Dhesi  Clinical Lecturer, Oral Maxillofacial Surgery
Dr. Emmanuel Illical  Clinical Lecturer, Orthopedic Surgery
Dr. Hyea Min Yoon  Clinical Lecturer, General Surgery
Dr. Alisha Poonja
Clinical Lecturer, Podiatric Surgery

Dr. Alisha Poonja is an academic podiatric surgeon born and raised in Calgary, Alberta. She pursued a Bachelor of Science degree at McGill University, followed by podiatric medical training at the New York College of Podiatric Medicine. Subsequently, she completed a three-year residency program in reconstructive foot and ankle surgery at Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx, New York. Dr. Poonja is currently seeing patients at Richmond Square Medical Center and the Zivot Limb Preservation Centre at the Peter Lougheed Hospital. Her research interests include diabetic limb salvage and forefoot reconstructive surgery.

Dr. Kenton Rommens
Clinical Lecturer, Vascular Surgery

Dr. Kenton Rommens completed his general surgery and vascular surgery training at the University of Calgary. He then completed an Advanced Thoracic Aortic Surgery and Structural Heart fellowship at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston. This focused on open thoracoabdominal and aortic arch surgery as well as endovascular repair of the aortic arch. Dr. Rommens returned to Calgary and joined the Section of Vascular Surgery in November 2019, and he is excited to be a part of the multidisciplinary Calgary Thoracic Aortic Program within the Libin Cardiovascular Institute. Dr. Rommens serves as the Competency by Design Director for the Vascular Surgery Residency Program and as an Area Trainer for the Connect Care implementation.

Dr. Kevin Robertson
Clinical Lecturer, Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery

Dr. Kevin Robertson was born and raised in Calgary, Alberta, and his studies have taken him to San Francisco, Chicago, and Melbourne, Australia. During his time in Melbourne, he completed a fellowship in Pediatric Maxillofacial Surgery at the Royal Children’s Hospital that included a focus on the surgical management of children with cleft lip/palate and many other craniofacial syndromes. Dr. Robertson is a member of the Cleft Palate Team at Alberta Children’s Hospital and provides care for adults and children at Peter Lougheed Centre and Alberta Children’s Hospital. His research interests include a focus on cleft care and craniofacial orthognathic surgery.
CONGRATULATIONS TO MEMBERS IN NEW POSITIONS

Please join us in welcoming these members to their new leadership positons in the department:

Dr. Michael Dunham, Interim Site Chief, South Health Campus, effective January 1, 2021
Dr. Eric Hyndman, Section Chief, Urology, effective January 1, 2021
Dr. Francis Sutherland, Deputy Department Head - Surgical Access Improvement, effective December 1, 2020
Dr. Nicholas Desy, Program Director Orthopedic Residency Program, effective December 1, 2020
Dr. Artan Reso, Interim Deputy Department Head - Clinical Services and Surgical Innovation, effective November 1, 2020
Dr. Elijah Dixon, Interim Department Head, effective November 1, 2020
Dr. John Toole, Interim Section Chief, Podiatry, effective November 1, 2020
Dr. Warren Yunker, Otolaryngology Residency Program Director, effective October 1, 2020
Dr. Andrea Lo, Pediatric General Surgery Residency Program Director, effective July 1, 2020
Dr. Derrick Randall, Physician Lead, Continuing Medical Education, effective July 1, 2020
Dr. Shamir Chandarana, Site Lead, Section of Otolaryngology, FMC, effective July 1, 2020
Dr. Antoine Bouchard-Fortier, Surgical Oncology Residency Program Director, effective July 1, 2020
Dr. Bryce Weber, Site Lead, Pediatric Urology, Section of Pediatric Surgery, ACH, effective June 15, 2020
Dr. Miller Smith, Quality Improvement Lead, Oral Maxillofacial Surgery, effective June 1, 2020
Dr. Karim Manji, Quality Improvement Lead, Podiatry, effective May 1, 2020
Dr. Kenton Rommens, Quality Improvement Lead, Vascular Surgery, effective May 1, 2020
Dr. Paul Beaudry, Section Chief-Pediatric Surgery and Site Chief-Surgery, ACH, effective April 1, 2020
Dr. Rohan Lall, Medical Director, Trauma Services, effective February 1, 2020
Dr. Michael Monument, Director, Office of Surgical Research, effective February 1, 2020
Dr. A. Harvey, Co-Physician Lead, Competency by Design, effective January 1, 2020
Dr. A. Harvey, Director of Program, Faculty, and Student Evaluation, CSM, effective January 1, 2020
Dr. Shannon Puloski, Site Lead, Section of Orthopedic Surgery, FMC, effective January 1, 2020
Dr. Ryan Rochon, General Surgery Residency Program Director, effective January 1, 2020
Dr. Carrie Liu, Quality Improvement Lead, Otolaryngology, effective November 1, 2019
THANK YOU TO RETIRED MEMBERS

We would like to recognize and thank our retired members for their dedication and years of hard work. We thank you for your academic and clinical contributions to the department and wish you a happy and fulfilling retirement.

Dr. Paul Marck, Otolaryngology
Dr. Robin Eccles, Pediatric General Surgery
Dr. Stanley Smith, Ophthalmology
Dr. Loren Kroetsch, Oral Maxillofacial Surgery
Dr. Andrew Wong, Pediatric General Surgery
Dr. Dale Birdsell, Plastic Surgery
Dr. Carolyn Skov, Ophthalmology
Dr. Ken Unger, Podiatry
Dr. Howard Gimbel, Ophthalmology

2021 DATES TO REMEMBER

Grand Rounds
March 5, 2021
April 9, 2021
June 4, 2021

Canada Orthopaedic Residency Forum
April 9-11, 2021

Surgeon’s Research Day
June 4, 2021

*Events will take place virtually to align with current government restrictions.