

Govt & Hospitals should ensure elective surgeries are resumed in earnest: MTaI

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Elective surgeries contribute approx. 50% to revenue of hospitals



Medical Technology Association of India has sought the government's intervention to ensure elective surgical procedures are resumed in earnest to pre COVID-19 level. This will enable hospitals to re-start their normal operations. The hospitals had to shut down their OPDs due to various government restrictions to control the spread of COVID19 pandemic, which severely impacted their revenue flow.

Elective surgeries are planned procedures and were mutually postponed by hospitals and patients due to fear of COVID infection. Cases that were postponed included removal of malignant tumours, critical endovascular and peripheral vascular surgeries, chemotherapy, dialysis, hip replacement surgery, and cataract among others. With restrictions being eased out, hospitals have started making provisions for elective surgeries but patients are still reluctant to turn up for procedures due to fear of contracting the infection.

Elective surgeries account for approximately 50% of revenues for hospitals in normal business conditions. Reduced revenues have curtailed hospitals' ability to pay for supplies of pharmaceuticals, diagnostics and medical devices, thereby severely disrupting entire healthcare value chain. More than 5 lakh planned surgeries in India have been re-scheduled since the imposition of lockdown.

The fall in revenue of hospitals is creating an unprecedented financial crisis for medical device sector due to delays in payment. Medical device companies are already dealing with an increase in operational expenses and limited availability of transportation and workers. This is further compounded by additional costs in complying with safety and hygiene standard operating procedures.

Sanjay Bhutani, Director, Medical Technology Association of India said, "The healthcare sector is in dire need of support to resume services to the optimal level. One quick measure in the current circumstances is resumption of elective procedures at the earliest. Hospitals need to work in tandem with the government to start elective surgeries without compromising their capabilities to handle COVID-19 cases. Creation of a clear communication module is equally important in order to allay any fears in the minds of patients."

Governments of many countries including the US, Australia, Japan, Canada and Singapore have allowed elective surgeries after balancing the community's needs against the risk of infection of COVID19. The measures that they have put in place

include:

- Adequate provisions to handle and treat COVID-19 cases in isolation.
- Adequate supply of PPEs, medications, ICU beds, and availability of human resources
- Prioritization of surgeries based on severity of illness.
- Regular screening of nonCOVID-19 patients and staff attending to them.
- Strict sanitation policies in both COVID-19 and nonCOVID-19 treatment areas.

In addition to the above, hospitals in India should also devise a module to communicate all the safety and screening measures they have taken to patients to give them the required confidence to appear for treatment.