Hamilton hepatobiliary and pancreatic surgery programs come together at Juravinski Hospital

Two remarkable surgical programs in Hamilton are joining forces to create one unified program. The hepatobiliary surgeons at Hamilton Health Sciences (HHS) and St. Joseph’s Healthcare Hamilton (SJHH) will all move to the Juravinski Hospital and Cancer Centre on April 4, 2011. The two teams will be working together to bring an enhanced level of care to patients across the Hamilton region.

Hepatobiliary refers to the liver, biliary “tree” or tract, and pancreas – organs that create, store and secrete enzymes that aid in the digestive process. Hepatobiliary surgery requires the use of sophisticated techniques, and the post-surgery care is often complicated as the organs re-establish their function and capacity. Approximately 70 per cent of hepatobiliary surgeries are performed to treat malignant tumors.

Over the years, St. Joseph’s and Hamilton Health Sciences have each developed unique, highly advanced hepatobiliary surgery programs. The high volume HHS program is regarded as a leader in the integration of surgery with interventional radiology. (Interventional radiology is when radiologists use diagnostic images to do noninvasive procedures like opening up veins that have narrowed because of disease.) The St. Joseph’s program is a leader in noninvasive surgical techniques, leveraging the expertise that has developed through St. Joseph’s innovative Centre for Minimal Access Surgery.

“We’re now ready to take our programs to the next level,” said Dr. Michael Marcaccio, a hepatobiliary surgeon at HHS. “Having all of the surgeons at one site will improve everything,” said Dr. Ved Tandan, a hepatobiliary surgeon at St. Joseph’s.

Evolution of a highly specialized type of care

The history behind this program consolidation illustrates the evolution that has occurred in many aspects of health care over the past two decades. At one time, numerous hospitals in Ontario were doing this type of surgery – 68 according to a study that looked at pancreatic resections (surgical removal of part of the pancreas) from 1988 to
1995. Fifty-six low-volume hospitals (doing less than 5 procedures a year) were performing 42 per cent of the total number of surgeries.

With many highly complex medical services, there is strong evidence that patient outcomes are better at centres that do more procedures compared to centres that do very few. So, as hepatobiliary surgery increased in sophistication, it became clear that it would be best to reduce the number of hospitals providing this service.

Gradually, the low-volume centres stopped doing hepatobiliary surgery and, in 2006, a Cancer Care Ontario task force established formal standards for these programs. The standards define the required qualifications of the surgeons and other staff, the resources that need to be dedicated to the program, the annual volume of patients to be treated by the institution, and the program’s success as measured by many standards including mortality rates. Last year, Cancer Care Ontario formally identified nine centres in the province as meeting these standards and designated them regional centres. Hamilton Health Sciences was designated as the centre for the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant Local Health Integration Network.

**Building on strength to provide enhanced patient care**

Hamilton’s new combined hepatobiliary surgery program will be the second largest in Ontario. The four surgeons – Drs. Deepak Dath, Michael Marcaccio, Leyo Ruo, and Ved Tandan – will consolidate their activity at the Juravinski Hospital and Cancer Centre on April 4. (Drs. Dath and Tandan are moving from St. Joseph’s Charlton Campus, and Drs. Marcaccio and Ruo are moving from McMaster University Medical Centre.) A fifth hepatobiliary surgeon is currently being recruited. Other health care professionals who are important to the hepatobiliary surgery programs are also moving to the Juravinski and, for everyone, there is some sadness.

“I have been at St. Joseph’s for 15 years and I really like the people and the place,” said Dr. Tandan. “But I know that by merging our two programs, it will be easier for us to collaborate on a daily basis, in how we handle the most challenging and complex cases.”

“One of our real hopes is that by increasing our critical mass and sharing resources, we’ll have more flexibility around the way we provide care, and how we manage the volume of patients who need our care,” said Dr. Marcaccio. “I’m also looking forward to advancing our laparoscopic techniques with support from our St. Joseph’s colleagues.”

“Bringing these two programs together will generate synergies that will help us build a unified service that benefits all patients,” said Dr. Bill Evans, president of the Juravinski
Hospital & Cancer Centre. “It will also ensure that we’re able to provide an ideal environment for training and research.”

**Realigning services in Hamilton**

Although the integration of Hamilton’s hepatobiliary surgery programs was triggered by Cancer Care Ontario’s directives, it complements Access to the Best Care (ABC), Hamilton Health Sciences’ plan to realign hospital services in Hamilton.

The Juravinski Hospital opened in August 2010 and is the host hospital for the Juravinski Cancer Centre. It has new operating suites, as well as leading-edge cancer care services and technology that will enhance the hepatobiliary surgery program.

“The hepatobiliary surgeons at St. Joseph’s and HHS have worked hard to establish a shared vision for their program and I know that it will make the patient care they provide even better,” said Dr. David Higgins, president of St. Joseph’s Healthcare Hamilton.

“Access to the Best Care is focused on building centres of excellence, improving resource utilization, and creating a sustainable hospital system for the future,” said Murray Martin, president and CEO of Hamilton Health Sciences. “The integration of the hepatobiliary surgery program fits well with that strategy and we look forward to seeing what this talented group of surgeons can achieve together.”

![Dr. Michael Marcaccio](image1.png)  
![Dr. Ved Tandan](image2.png)