

Monday Message: March 3, 2025

March is here and with it some signs that spring is on its way. Some of you are on holiday this week, some next and some both—Enjoy your time off! It is precious.

Some of my first Monday messages addressed topics like trust, psychological safety and civility in the work place. We introduced a DOS code of conduct.

As we are all under pressure from NSH, government, our patients and also from our families, it becomes challenging for us to maintain composure. Everybody wants a piece of us, wants more of our time, our attention, leaving nothing for ourselves.

Vacations are important to allow us to catch our breath, refocus and put things in perspective. They should be restorative.

I hope that those of you taking holiday over the March break time return refreshed and rejuvenated.

As noted previously many folks are looking for more news from my office. We are working on developing a monthly newsletter.

In the meantime, I will share a few things from recent meetings and presentations.

OPOR continues barrelling down the tracks. IWK will be the first aiming for August 2025. QE II will follow aiming for Jan-Feb 2026.

Danika Woodburn presented to ZMAC in December, a couple of key points for surgeons:

- Recruitment of physician champions in care areas is underway. The champions will be funded for department presentations and work promoting OPOR. The funding will be similar to that of the design sessions, based on sessional rates. Champions should be endorsed by their department leadership. The ideal candidate for this position is an enthusiastic, early adopter type who is comfortable with tech.
- Training will be **required** for all physicians before OPOR goes live.

We have invited Dr Julie Marenda who is now the physician lead for OPOR to speak to us about OPOR at our quarterly business meeting. There will be lots of opportunity for questions.

Our periop director Deb Garnier presents to NSH executive leadership every month on our progress in meeting periop targets.

A few key points from this month's presentation are:

69% of our scheduled surgeries in CZ were completed within their wait time benchmark.

For IWK it was 34%. For cancer cases the numbers vary from 26% for breast cancer surgery, 38% for lung cancer, 48% for colorectal cancer. Surgical volumes are up CZ 111% and IWK 110% compared to Jan 2020.

Number of patients on the surgical waitlists is decreasing with CZ just over target but IWK still has a lot of patients on their waitlist- importantly IWK has decrease their waitlist by 15%

17% of patients in CZ have been waiting more the 365 days, 21% for IWK.

As you know the Lucas Algorithm used by the central booking clerks develops potential lists of patients for surgery based on acuity (surgery within 2 weeks, 1 month, 3 months, 6 months and 12 months) as well as time waiting.

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In other zones the booking clerks simply book the list developed by the algorithm.

In CZ we have pushed back on this based on case and patient complexity such that each surgeon has final approval of their list. Even though we have modified the process for centralized booking to better reflect the realities of our practice, we are still delivering on the goals: reducing the waitlist, reducing the number of long waiters and increased volumes.

Have a great week  
gail

Monday Message: March 10, 2025

Happy belated Women's Day!

So far in 2025, two women have joined our faculty: Dr Elise Graham, a pediatric ENT surgeon at IWK and Dr Catherine Deshaies, a congenital cardiac surgeon at IWK.

In medicine, women make up 50% of medical school classes and have done so for years. In surgical training programs the proportion of women varies but overall, I think women have an equal opportunity to be selected to surgical residency.

To be honest, I have wondered why we still need to have a day to celebrate women. Then something reminds me that for many women- even here in Canada- the playing field is not level. Having said that, Dalhousie surgery appears to have a more level playing field compared to my previous place of work!

In Canada, women are recognized as independent human beings with the same rights as men. Elsewhere in the world women are treated as lesser beings, subjugated to the will of men, of government, treated as chattel. But even here in Nova Scotia, there is an alarming amount of intimate partner violence and likely we only know about the tip of the iceberg- women who are murdered by their partners. We don't hear about those who are abused emotionally, physically, or financially.

So, it appears that there is still work to be done. I would like to emphasize that this is not a zero-sum game. Empowering women does not mean that men should be disadvantaged. Indeed, the old saying "a rising tide floats all boats" is very apropos.

Have a good week!  
gail

Monday Message: March 17, 2025

Happy St Patrick's Day!

The first day of spring is just around the corner and it really feels like it with temperatures warming up. In my walks to work I am hearing some bird song- other than the usual gulls and crows.

The monotheistic religions (Christianity, Islam, Judaism) all have important events in the spring. Although religion is a source of conflict in many parts of the world, in truth there is much that should unite us. Putting myself at risk for saying such things, and acknowledging I am not a scholar of religion, most if not all religions provide us with a code of conduct- a guide as to how we should live our lives. All have a version of the "Golden rule". All speak of respect.

Respect underlies the code of conduct for all civil societies.

Yet based on the news and social media, incivility is becoming normalized. We cannot give in to this. DOS has a code of conduct which emphasizes respect and civility.

Respect and civility are the foundation of our DOS culture.

I think everyone is aware of the big stuff but the small things-- the eye-rolling, the microaggressions are just as bad. I would also remind you that it is unprofessional and completely unacceptable to make disparaging comments about a colleague. Full stop. None of us are perfect but we all deserve respect.

I apologize for the "preachy" message. Unfortunately, a reminder was necessary.

Have a good week and enjoy the spring weather

gail

Monday Message: March 24, 2025

This will be a busy week in the Department of Surgery!

It seems that there was a lull at the end of February which drifted into March break and now we are full on back to work!

Monday evening, we have our DOS executive meeting.

For those not on the executive—we meet every 2 weeks with some exceptions—the usual Christmas break and less often in the summer.

The executive is the governing body that runs the department. It is the interface between surgeons, NSH and IWK and Dal. We have an education committee led by Dr Gerard Corsten, a research committee led by Dr Mike Bezuhly, a Quality Committee led by Dr Greg Hirsch and a finance committee led by Dr Mark Taylor. The executive is responsible under the direction of the Department Head for developing our strategic plan, setting policies, and ensuring communication of relevant information to members. This means division heads should report back to their members information shared at executive that is relevant to them. The executive serves and is accountable to the members but is also accountable to NSH, IWK and Dal.

At our strategic planning retreat over a year ago, it was identified that we did not have a governance committee overseeing the work of the executive ensuring that we are doing our job and serving our members. We are developing a terms of reference for a governance committee and will be having an open call for members in the near future.

On Tuesday we have our quarterly business meeting. Dr Julie Maranda has graciously offered her time to meet with us specifically to answer questions about OPOR from members. I suggest you forward your question in advance to Charlene – but if you can't think of anything off the top of your head—no worries- we will take them on the spot Tuesday evening. Dr Taylor will also present the proposed DOS budget for 25-26.

On Wednesday am we have our DOS grand rounds presented by Dr Greg Hirsch on the important topic of quality entitled: "Update on quality improvement efforts in surgery". In reviewing our progress to date on our strategic plan implemented January 2024, we identified that we still had a lot of work to do in the domain of Quality.

Of course we are all aware of NSQIP. There is a drop in learning opportunity at HI on March 25<sup>th</sup> so those who want to learn more.

Our NSQIP results are not great but now we need to do a deeper dive, root cause analysis and identify solutions. These have to happen at the divisional level.

Similarly, every surgeon needs to know their own results—whether it is SSI, mortality, flap failure, anastomotic leak, recath, postop stroke, etc.

Most groups do not have detailed databases, many rely on that very fallible strategy – surgeon memory. Who enters the data for these databases? Where does the funding come from? These are important questions and are barriers to creation and utilization of specialty specific patient outcome databases.

This is a problem that we need to fix. Some groups have resources to address this—others don't. It seems to me that we need to identify sustainable funding to support this work.

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We can only improve if we know our own results.

On a more celebratory note- please join me on **Wednesday 5-7 pm drinks and nibbles at Your Father's Moustache** to welcome our new faculty: Dr Ali Quimby, Dr Phil Tremblay, Dr Bernard Burgeson, Dr Ayham Al Afif, Dr Chris Chin, Dr Nadim Joukhadr, Dr Kevin Morash, Dr Andy Simpson, Dr Elise Graham, Dr Rhys Kavanagh and Dr Catherine Deshaies. I hope to see you there!

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Monday Message: March 31, 2025

Good Morning All- last day of March!!

Today is the deadline for you to opt in to the DNS physician retirement fund.

Following up from last week's business meeting- Dr Julie Maranda shared with us that we will have to use our NSHealth email in order to use OPOR. You will not be able to use your Dal email. For those of you who work at IWK, you should have started your OPOR "learning journey" and will be starting hands on training soon. For the rest-- OPOR will contact you when it is time for you to start your training. I like that they have done this- so that we will get training when we need to know not so far in advance that we will forget everything before we need to use it!!

There is a new learning module on Code of Conduct from NSH. I will forward the link to you. It is a good refresher for us all.

This summer there will be a reduced slow down. Nursing and anesthesia plan their schedules well in advance-so have already put in their holiday requests. I think for many of us, our summer plans are a bit more fluid, a bit vague. It is very important that we show up for work when we are assigned OR days. -We cannot have surgeons giving back days at the last minute. These are recorded as "surgeon unavailable". Of course, some reasons are unavoidable, illness for example. We also cannot assume that someone in our division will pick up the day(s).

I have sent the summer OR schedules to division heads. I am not asking you to change your holiday plans. I am asking that you commit to work when you are assigned to work. But if the assigned days conflict with your plans - let us know now.

We need to know if the days will not be filled.

Thank you for your help with this.

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