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## **COVID-19 disruption will lead to 28 million surgeries being cancelled worldwide – 146 000 in South Africa**

Over 28 million elective surgeries across the globe could be cancelled as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic – leading to patients facing a lengthy wait for their health issues to be resolved, a new study reveals.

The *CovidSurg Collaborative* has projected that, based on a 12-week period of peak disruption to hospital services due to COVID-19, 28.4 million elective surgeries worldwide will be cancelled or postponed in 2020. The modelling study, published in the *British Journal of Surgery*, indicates that each additional week of disruption to hospital services will be associated with a further 2.4 million cancellations.

Led by researchers at the University of Birmingham, researchers including those from the University of Cape Town (UCT) collected detailed information from surgeons across 359 hospitals and 71 countries on plans for cancellation of elective surgery. This data was then statistically modelled to estimate totals for cancelled surgery across 190 countries.

The researchers project that worldwide 72.3% of planned surgeries would be cancelled through the peak period of COVID-19 related disruption. Most cancelled surgeries will be for non-cancer conditions. Orthopaedic procedures will be cancelled most frequently, with 6.3 million orthopaedic surgeries cancelled worldwide over a 12-week period. It is also projected that globally 2.3 million cancer surgeries will be cancelled or postponed.

In the South Africa, it is estimated that this will result in over 146 000 cancelled surgeries, including 12 000 cancer procedures. These cancellations will create a backlog that will need to be cleared after the COVID-19 disruption ends.

Professor Bruce Biccard, Professor and Second Chair in the Department of Anaesthesia and Perioperative Medicine at UCT, said: "Each additional week of disruption to hospital services results in an additional 12 000 surgeries being cancelled. Following the surge in the epidemic, we are going to need a continuous assessment of the situation, so that we can plan a safe resumption of elective surgery at the earliest opportunity.

Clearing the backlog of elective surgeries created by COVID-19 is going to result in a significant additional cost for the national Health Department. The government will have to ensure that

the national Department of Health is provided with additional funding and resources to ramp up elective surgery to clear the backlog.”

Aneel Bhangu, consultant surgeon and senior lecturer at the NIHR Global Health Research Unit on Global Surgery at the University of Birmingham, commented: 'During the COVID-19 pandemic elective surgeries have been cancelled to reduce the risk of patients being exposed to COVID-19 in hospital, and to support the wider hospital response, for example by converting operating theatres into intensive care units.

“Although essential, cancellations place a heavy burden on patients and society. Patients' conditions may deteriorate, worsening their quality of life as they wait for rescheduled surgery. In some cases, for example cancer, delayed surgeries may lead to a number of unnecessary deaths.”

[Read the full study.](#)

### **Notes to Editors**

- Country-level data on cancelled elective surgery is available in the study manuscript for 190 countries. This data is split into 15 specialties providing a comprehensive overview of the local impact of COVID-19 on surgery.
- The *CovidSurg Collaborative* is a research network focussed on the impact of COVID-19 on surgical care. Over 5 000 surgeons from across 120 countries are participating in the CovidSurg programme. The Collaborative is leading two cohort studies collecting patient-level surgical outcomes data; currently data on 7 500 patients has been entered by 440 hospitals worldwide.
- This study was led by *CovidSurg Collaborative* members based in the United Kingdom, Benin, Ghana, India, Italy, Mexico, Nigeria, Rwanda, Spain, South Africa, and the United States.

***ENDS***

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