1.0 PROTOCOL

When demands for urgent and emergent care continue to mount and no Emergency Department (ED) care spaces are available for these emergent and urgent patients and all usual actions for rapid admissions to inpatient beds have been maximized, the Over Capacity Protocol should be initiated. This protocol is intended to ensure systematic actions are undertaken to ensure admitted patients being cared for in the ED will be appropriately admitted to an inpatient unit. The protocol may be extended to other areas of the hospital, for example critical care, as required.

Persons presenting to the Emergency Department who are in need of an inpatient admission shall be admitted under an accepting Most Responsible Physician (MRP) to the appropriate clinical service. The MRP shall determine the need for admission including the degree of urgency. The MRP shall assume responsibility for the overall care of the patient regardless of the location of the patient in accordance with the Fraser Health’s Most Responsible Physician policy and other standard operating policies of Fraser Health.

Patients in the Emergency Department who are in need of inpatient admission shall be subject to the current admitting processes. Discussions between nurses from the ED and receiving units will occur to ensure that clinical patient care needs are met.

Inpatients who have been admitted to an over-capacity inpatient bed shall be considered for the next available standard inpatient bed located on an appropriate unit. Treatment and care of all patients will continue on admission to an inpatient unit regardless of location.

2.0 PURPOSE

To minimize the risk to patients waiting for admission and treatment in Emergency Departments.

Prolonged stays in the Emergency Department directly impacts the Emergency Department's ability to assess and treat other patients in a timely and appropriate manner. The risk to patient safety and patient outcome is greater in those patients waiting with undetermined diagnoses in the waiting room than to those patients who may be moved to an over capacity bed in the facility.
3.0 DEFINITION
Over capacity involves placing patients to areas outside of the Emergency Department that are above the existing bed census for the site.

4.0 GUIDING PRINCIPLES
- Fraser Health is committed to ensuring the timely admission of all patients.
- Fraser Health will endeavour to ensure that admitted patients in Emergency who require inpatient care are admitted to an inpatient unit where the clinical knowledge and skills are appropriate for the patient’s care requirements.
- Fraser Health recognizes its Emergency Department resources are intended to provide a response to persons with urgent or emergent clinical needs. Emergency Department resources are not intended to be used for ongoing inpatient care.
- Patient safety and appropriateness of care are paramount considerations in determining the unit to which an emergency inpatient should be admitted.
- The risk to patient safety and patient outcome is greater in those patients waiting with an undetermined diagnosis than to those patients who have been examined, investigated, diagnosed and are awaiting admission to hospital.
- Hospital overcrowding needs to be addressed with the support of the entire health care system.
- Steps will always be taken to maximize patient flow and resource allocation prior to implementing the Over Capacity Protocol.
- Fraser Health acknowledges that the use of an Over Capacity Protocol is a serious and significant action and must be monitored for its potential to cause negative patient outcomes.

5.0 CRITERIA FOR IMPLEMENTATION
- All steps in the site for decongesting the Emergency Department have been enacted without measurable relief.
- The Emergency Department is no longer able to safely continue to receive incoming patients.

6.0 PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE PATIENT SELECTION FOR OVER CAPACITY BED
- All patients must have admitting orders and an MRP.
Each unit will determine patient selection and location for over capacity in consultation with Site Leaders/Access.

In the absence of an appropriate patient to transfer from the Emergency Department, patient care units will review the existing inpatient population for a suitable patient to place in the Over Capacity Protocol bed so that the emergency patient can be transferred immediately.

7.0 REPORTING

Each site will include the number of patients transferred to inpatient units under the Over Capacity Protocol on the Access daily bed status reports.

8.0 PROCEDURES

See the pertinent Hospital’s Decongestion Plan for details about the location of patients, patient care needs and staffing models.

9.0 EVALUATION

- Ongoing patient care quality review process at each hospital
- Fraser Health’s Emergency Status Access Report

10.0 REFERENCES

- www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/policydb/ - “Admission of Patients to Over-Capacity Inpatient Beds” - Policy # 1451
- Vancouver Coastal Health Authority – "Over Capacity Protocol”