Dear patients, families and friends,

All of us at Massachusetts General Hospital are committed to making sure our patients receive the safest, most compassionate and highest-quality care. Every action we take is focused on doing what is best for each patient and family. With this promise in mind, we were quite troubled to see our hospital featured in an article in The Boston Globe suggesting that we practice surgery in a way that could harm patients. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The article described a practice called concurrent – or overlapping – surgery, an important method of managing operating rooms that is widely used at academic medical centers and community hospitals. Overlapping surgery involves the careful planning and scheduling of certain cases in the operating room throughout the day. Overlapping may occur, for example, when a surgeon is finishing a procedure in one operating room and the next patient is moved into a second room so that case can begin in a more timely way. The surgeon is always there for the important parts of the procedure.

We are confident that our surgical practices are very safe and among the strongest in the nation. The American College of Surgeons, in fact, called our overlapping surgery policy a best practice and said it exceeds national standards.

We have reviewed the complication rates in overlapping and non-overlapping surgeries and found the rates to be the same. We also have reviewed overlapping cases with complications from 2013 and 2014 and found no association between the complications and overlapping. Several studies from other hospitals around the country have shown similar results.

Still, we understand that the Globe story may raise questions, and we want you to have reliable information and the answers you need. We have put together a website with materials and data about overlapping surgery that we hope you will find helpful. We encourage you and your family to visit the website at http://www.massgeneral.org/overlapping-surgery/.

High-quality health care is a partnership that involves you, your family and your health care team working together to make decisions that are best for you. We encourage you to talk with your doctors and nurses about any questions or concerns you may have about your care. We welcome the conversation.

Thank you,

Jeanette Ives Erickson, RN, DNP  
Senior Vice President for Patient Care and Chief Nurse

Britain Nicholson, MD  
Senior Vice President and Chief Medical Officer