

Cutting Edge

March 2026

FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome to the first edition of *Cutting Edge* for 2026

Despite the recent Christmas and summer break, activity has not slowed for the Aotearoa New Zealand National Committee or the College more broadly.

We have been pleased to contribute to the Medical Council working groups established to address the regulation of physician associates. The College has submitted its position statement, emphasising that patient safety must remain paramount and that nomenclature must not create confusion for patients. We are also committed to ensuring there is no scope creep and that our trainees are neither disadvantaged in terms of clinical exposure nor placed in vulnerable positions through inappropriate supervisory expectations.

Workforce issues have featured prominently across all specialties over the past year, including surgery. This is a complex challenge requiring a multifaceted response—there is no single solution. While we encourage overseas fellowships to broaden surgical experience, this has contributed to the attrition of highly trained New Zealand surgeons who do not return. Many trainees wish to come back to New Zealand, but without a confirmed job offer in advance, overseas employment opportunities are understandably attractive. RACS has been working closely alongside Te Whatu Ora around a commitment to advanced employment offers for trainees so that we do not lose these valuable colleagues. This work has



an ambitious timeline and is promising for the coming year.

We have also been working with Te Whatu Ora to implement a new bulk billing system for surgical trainees in 2026. Whereas previously trainees have had to pay their training fees directly, and then seek reimbursement from their employer, RACS can now bill Te Whatu Ora directly.

Another approach under discussion at the National Committee is how to continue attracting well-trained overseas surgeons to practise in New Zealand, while maintaining high standards and quality of care. There is already a robust process to assess and supervise overseas-trained doctors, and these colleagues make an invaluable contribution to patient care across the motu.

However, many International Medical Graduates (IMGs) who work alongside us do not pursue College Fellowship. The process is often perceived as overly arduous and financially challenging, and it differs from the pathway in Australia, where surgeons are invited to become FRACS upon completion of the IMG

process. Encouraging our colleagues to join the Fellowship strengthens the College's community of practice, supports retention, and enhances our ability to represent and advocate for all surgeons nationally. We are currently looking in to ways to make this a more streamlined process in AoNZ for IMGs, while ensuring high standards expected of FRACS are retained.

The College will turn 100 in February 2027. It was established here in New Zealand to raise surgical standards and recognise surgical expertise across Australia and New Zealand. The first meeting was held in Dunedin, and the College was founded by Sir Louis Barnett as the New Zealand chapter of the British Medical Association. Centenary celebrations will take place throughout Australasia, honouring the past while looking to the future.

In New Zealand, we plan to hold the NZ Annual Scientific Meeting in Dunedin in February to mark the occasion. The programme plans to include workshops that support fellows CPD requirements

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HAVE YOU DONE YOUR CPD FOR 2025?

A friendly reminder that CPD was due 28 February. It may not be too late, and the team is here to support you, so please contact us at cpd.college@surgeons.org or on +64 4 595 1432.

Looking for cultural safety training in 2026?

- RACS Cultural Safety Resources - [Cultural Safety Training | RACS](#)
- Tiriti-based Futures 21-26 March <https://www.tiritibasedfutures.info/>
- Council of Medical Colleges New Zealand - [CMC Self-Reflection Tool](#)

Specialty Advisor for MacCormick Trust – Men’s Health

Expressions of interest sought

A new trust has recently been established by the Estate of Michael MacCormac which seeks to fund research into Men’s Health issues. The Trust has specifically asked for a Fellow of RACS to act as a Specialty Advisor to the Trust, to assist with determining how its funding should be allocated each year.

This role would suit someone with an academic background who is active in research.

The Trust meets online between two to three times each year.

If you would like to express your interest in this role, or would like to know more, please contact the RACS Aotearoa New Zealand Office at College.NZ@surgeons.org.

and a celebratory dinner, and the annual Louis Barnett prize in the Barnett lecture theatre at the medical school. The AoNZNC Committee is working closely with the Centenary Working Group, and the New Zealand celebrations are one of the College’s flagship initiatives. As the birthplace of the College, we feel a strong sense of pride in being at the centre of these commemorations. We warmly encourage those who can to join us in Dunedin to celebrate.

With the establishment of the College’s new board structure, Council is now able to focus more strategically and innovatively on how we deliver our core business. One major project currently underway is the Surgical Pathways

Strategy, which will help shape the future direction of surgical training. This is in response to many internal and external considerations including the evolution of our relationship within our valued training network partners and societies, the fact that the SET program is 20 years old and the significant pressures from our regulators and training environments in both countries.

The Strategy proposes a modern, unified approach to surgical education across Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia, with a focus on governance, partnerships, selection processes, and sustainability. Amongst its priorities, the strategy aims to strengthen accreditation and accountability, further improve our

relationship with our training partners and societies, elevate support for trainers and supervisors, and commits to earlier and more flexible entry routes to training. The consultation process with stakeholders has commenced aiming for a co design process which will be implemented as consensus is reached over the next couple of years.



Dr Ros Pochin,
Chair, Aotearoa New Zealand National Committee



Younger Fellows Update

Welcome to 2026.

For many recently qualified Fellows, undertaking an overseas fellowship remains an important step on the path to consultancy. These opportunities allow surgeons to develop advanced expertise in areas of service need and, ideally, to return home with skills that strengthen our local departments and improve care for patients across Aotearoa New Zealand.

However, a significant challenge has been the uncertainty of employment on return. Too often, Fellows head overseas without a confirmed position to come back to. After investing significant time, effort, and resources training within the Aotearoa New Zealand health system, we risk losing highly skilled surgeons who understand our systems, communities, and patients best.

Encouragingly, Health NZ has acknowledged this issue in its Health Workforce Plan, with specific reference to “keeping our people while on fellowship.” The intention is to create a more streamlined pathway for advanced employment offers for Health NZ employees undertaking vocational training overseas. While some centres around the motu already provide this security, we hope this national direction will support more consistent arrangements. Greater certainty will allow our junior colleagues to pursue

fellowship training with confidence that there is a role waiting for them at home.

There are, however, important details still to be worked through. One consideration is that returning doctors may be appointed to a region of workforce need rather than a specific hospital of their choosing. While understandable from a workforce perspective, this can complicate life planning, particularly for those with partners or dependents. Initial discussions have also indicated that these roles would default to 1.0 FTE positions. The Aotearoa New Zealand Committee of RACS has advocated for flexibility, including the option of appointments of less than 1.0 FTE where appropriate.

Looking ahead, the Younger Fellows Forum will be held immediately prior to the RACS Annual Scientific Congress in Perth at the end of April. Fellows within 10 years of attaining FRACS who have not previously attended a forum are warmly encouraged to attend. This three-day forum provides an opportunity to connect with peers, share experiences, and discuss current issues affecting surgical practice. The forum will also provide an opportunity to contribute directly to College priorities by developing recommendations for Council. For further information, please

contact Caitlyn at younger.fellows@surgeons.org.

Finally, I encourage all Younger Fellows to become more actively involved in the College. We represent approximately 30% of the College and bring a vital and distinctive perspective on what it means to be a surgeon today. As our profession continues to evolve, RACS is keen to hear from us to ensure Younger Fellows are part of shaping its future.

With our Centenary celebrations taking place next February, including events planned in Dunedin, there will be many opportunities to connect and contribute. I warmly encourage you to take part and be involved.

Please share your thoughts and ideas, so feel free to get in touch at michael.bergin@cdhb.health.nz.

Dr Michael Bergin

Younger Fellows Representative, Aotearoa New Zealand National Committee

Congratulations to the 2026 AoNZ RACS awards recipients

We are thrilled to share that five AoNZ Fellows have received RACS awards following Council's Awards Committee meeting at the end of 2025. These awards will be presented at either the 2026 ASC in Perth in May, or 2027 AoNZ Centenary ASM in Dunedin in February 2027.

Dr Greg Robertson – Colin McRae Medal
 Dr Russel Bouchier – ESR Hughes Award
 Dr Kiki Maoate – RACS International Medal

Professor Ian Civil – Sir Hugh Devine Medal
 Professor Andrew Hill – Sir Louis Barnett Medal

We wish to extend our congratulations to these recipients, and to express our thanks to everyone who nominated them for these awards.

The Aotearoa New Zealand National Committee is always looking to promote and recognise the excellent work that

our Fellows do in Aotearoa New Zealand. If you know of someone who you believe should be nominated for an award, be it a RACS award or a Royal honour, please contact us at College.NZ@surgeons.org. Our AoNZ Awards Committee meets throughout the year and is always seeking nominations.

National Committee elections: nominations are open

Interested in advocacy and governance?
 Be a voice for surgery at RACS.

Nominate yourself for election to vacant positions on the Aotearoa New Zealand National Committee (AoNZNC).

Nominations opened on Friday 27 February 2026. They close on Monday 16 March 2026.

The AoNZNC (<https://bit.ly/3uuWd6l>) has members representing RACS' nine surgical specialities. It advocates on local members' behalf, both within Council and in its relationships with the Aotearoa New Zealand government. The Committee also provides support to our membership and beyond, including medical students, junior doctors, surgical Trainees and Specialist International Medical Graduates (SIMGs).

You will have already received an email (from Friday 27 February) with a link, which will enable you to complete your nomination form. You will need two other Fellows to support your nomination.*

If you do not wish to nominate yourself, you can still get involved by voting for your colleagues who do. If there are more nominations than available positions, voting will open on Friday 20 March and close on Monday 13 April 2026.

**Please note you must be a current RACS Fellow to nominate and your supporters must also be current RACS Fellows.*



Royal Australasian
College of Surgeons
Te Whare Piki Ora o Māhutonga

**Aotearoa New Zealand
 National Committee Elections 2026**

Nominate now!

Louis Barnett Prize 2026

Your research deserves its moment

Are you, or do you know, a Trainee or Fellow within the first five years of their Fellowship, who is a citizen or permanent resident of Aotearoa New Zealand, and whose academic research is making a meaningful impact?

If so, now is the time to submit an abstract for the Louis Barnett Prize 2026, or to encourage a colleague to enter.

Valued at \$2500, this prestigious award recognises exceptional research that advances surgical knowledge and improves patient care.

Research conducted within or outside Aotearoa New Zealand, within or outside a department of surgery, and before or after beginning surgical training is eligible.

How to apply

Abstracts must follow the guidelines available [here](#).

Submit your abstract to College.NZ@surgeons.org, including a brief cover email outlining your role in the research.

Note: only one abstract may be submitted per person.



Key dates

- Abstract submissions close: Monday 6 April 2026.
- Finalist presentations: Thursday 2 July 2026, 7pm NZST (virtual standalone event).
- The winner will be announced at the conclusion of the event.

About the Louis Barnett prize

Established in 1962, the prize honours Sir Louis Barnett CMG - pioneering surgical

researcher, RACS founder, and the first surgeon from Aotearoa New Zealand to serve as College president.

Louis Barnett finalists' presentations

Make sure you bookmark Thursday 2 July in your diary and join us online at this event. More information, including event details and registration link will be available soon.

For full details, visit the Louis Barnett Prize page on the [RACS website](#).

NZSOHNS ASM 2026

We warmly welcome you to join us at the 79th Annual General Scientific and Scientific Meeting of the New Zealand Society of Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery, to be held at The Cordis Hotel, Auckland, New Zealand; from 27th – 30th October 2026.

ORL 2026 aims to bring together leading experts, researchers, and professionals in the field of Otolaryngology, Head & Neck Surgery, providing a unique platform for knowledge exchange, networking opportunities, and the exploration of innovative developments in the ORL field.

With a diverse range of sessions, panel discussions, and workshops, the conference promises to be an

enlightening and immersive experience for all participants, regardless of whether your work is focused on the full breadth of ORL or any of the sub-specialties.

In addition to the informative sessions, ORL 2026 will also feature a vibrant exhibition hall, showcasing the latest advancements in medical equipment, pharmaceuticals, and related services.

This will be an excellent opportunity for you to connect with industry leaders and explore cutting-edge technologies that can enhance your clinical practice.

Visit the conference website at www.orl26.nz for more information and to register.

New RACS online module champions sustainability in surgery



Royal Australasian
College of Surgeons

Environmental Sustainability in Surgery course

A short, one-hour online course designed to support you in reducing the environmental impact of surgical care.

1
CPD
HOUR

Complete the course

Developed by members of the RACS Environmental Sustainability in Surgical Practice Working Party (ESSWP) in collaboration with researchers from The University of Sydney, the course includes an educational video created by the Sydney Health Literacy Lab. Participants complete a short pre and postlearning quiz to meet CPD requirements.

Dr Ben Dunne, Chair of ESSWP says, “Environmental sustainability and high-quality surgical care are not competing priorities. Designed specifically for busy surgeons, this course focuses on practical, clinically relevant steps to reduce the environmental impact of everyday surgical care, improve patient outcomes, and support surgeons in meeting their College CPD requirements.”

By the end of the program, learners will understand the relationship between climate change and health, recognise surgery’s contribution to emissions, and identify practical strategies—both individual and organisational—to reduce the carbon footprint of surgical care.

The course is available online now, and all Fellows, SET Trainees, and SIMGs are encouraged to explore how small changes in practice can drive meaningful environmental improvement.

Register for the course here: <https://elearning.surgeons.org/course/view.php?id=680>

RACS has launched a new online learning opportunity designed to support surgeons and Trainees in reducing the environmental impact of surgical care. The RACS CPD module on environmental sustainability in surgery and reducing low-value care is now live on the College eLearning platform and open to Fellows, SET Trainees, SIMGs, JDocs and PGY3+ doctors. Those who complete the course will obtain 1 CPD hour.

Environmental Sustainability in Surgery is a three-part, self-paced module exploring the links between healthcare, carbon emissions and clinical decision-making. As healthcare continues to contribute significantly to global emissions, this course equips those with practical strategies to improve the environmental

sustainability of surgical care without compromising patient outcomes.

Module 1 examines the relationship between surgery, global emissions and climate change, outlining the growing evidence behind environmentally sustainable healthcare.

Module 2 includes video interviews with surgeons and Trainees who are actively implementing sustainable practices, offering real-world examples of change in action.

Module 3 focuses on reducing low-value care and invites participants to contribute to a research project in collaboration with the University of Sydney into clinicians’ knowledge, attitudes and behaviour regarding low-value practices and their carbon footprint.

NZAGS ASM 2026

Kia ora! Join us for the New Zealand Association of General Surgeons (NZAGS) ASM 2026 in Dunedin from 21-22 March 2026.

This year’s theme, Te Mahi Hapori, Te Awhi Hou | Serving Communities, Embracing Innovation, reflects our commitment to advancing surgical practice and supporting our communities.

For further details, please find out more about the [NZAGS Annual Scientific Meeting 2026](#)



21/22 March 2026
Dunedin Centre

NZAGS 26

Te Mahi Hapori,
Te Awhi Hou
Serving Communities,
Embracing Innovation

NZAGS
New Zealand Association
of General Surgeons

Te Ngāhurutanga ō Pūhoro – Celebrating ten years of Māori student success

Every year, the Pūhoro Trust travels around schools in Aotearoa New Zealand, presenting to thousands of secondary students on careers in STEM. The additional M in STEM stands for Mātauranga Māori, with Pūhoro offering a unique perspective from a Māori worldview across all the STEM subject. In 2021, RACS' Te Rau Poka Māori Surgical Academy and Pūhoro Trust formed a partnership to include sessions on medicine and surgery as a career choice, with RACS Fellows and Trainees presenting to students on their experiences. Since then, we estimate that over 2000 students have attended the RACS' presentations in the past 4 years.

Pūhoro recently celebrated its tenth anniversary and invited all of their partners and sponsors to attend a special dinner at the Palmerston North Events Centre. Dr Ruth Herd (RACS' Kaiwhakarite Hauora Māori Health Equity Lead) attended the event on behalf of the College and Te Rau Poka. The highlight of the evening was hearing from one of the 2025 Pūhoro graduates Asela Mosese (Te Rarawa / Samoa) who is starting at Auckland Medical School this year.



Asela told the 200 plus attendees that she was inspired by the presentation by Dr John Mutu – Grigg an Orthopaedic surgeon from Auckland. John shared how he gets joy from his work and loves helping people. Another key influence for Asela is her whānau. A core strength that Asela brings to her training is her understanding of Te Ao Māori.

Pūhoro say that over 90 students have indicated that they will pursue medical careers and at least four have made it into medical school. We are very

grateful to our partners Pūhoro Trust for their dedication to raising students achievements and to realise their dreams. Te Rau Poka Academy is looking forward to another season presenting to students around Aotearoa. We wish Asela and the others all the best this first year of medical school.

Image L-R: Leanne Wagner, Asela Mosese and Ruth Herd at the Pūhoro 10th Anniversary dinner

Operating with Respect – Wellington

Saturday 15 August 2026 | Wellington

RACS is delivering the only Operating with Respect course in Aotearoa New Zealand for 2026, held face-to-face at the RACS New Zealand Office in Wellington.

This surgeon led course is open to all Fellows and SIMGs and provides 7 CPD hours. It equips participants with practical strategies to recognise, respond to, and prevent discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment, while promoting reflection, self-awareness and respectful workplace culture.

The course is compulsory for Surgical Supervisors and RACS Committee members.

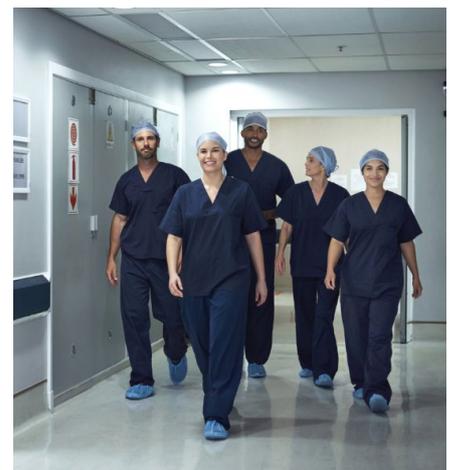
Cost:

RACS Members: A\$400 / NZ\$430 (refundable on attendance)

Nonmembers: A\$650 / NZ\$700 (nonrefundable)

Register: [Operating with Respect | RACS](#)

More information: [Operating with Respect | RACS](#)





Uniting professionals to
prevent skin cancers
and save lives

Join us for the
New Zealand Skin Cancer Summit
18-20 June 2026
InterContinental Wellington

Help prevent and detect skin cancers and improve outcomes for patients and communities

Thursday 18 June (optional)
Skin Surgery Masterclass
Advanced Dermoscopy Masterclass

Friday 19 June - Saturday 20 June
New Zealand Skin Cancer Summit

[Register today](#)

With nearly 100,000 New Zealanders diagnosed with skin cancer each year and around 500 lives lost, we cannot afford complacency. This Summit will bring together more than 200 clinicians, researchers, and sector leaders to strengthen collaboration, share knowledge, and shape practical solutions that improve outcomes across New Zealand.

This will be the first Summit we host as Skin Cancer New Zealand, and the first to address all types of skin cancer, not just melanoma. Our 2026 theme, “*Equity in Action: Bridging Gaps for Skin Cancer*”, reflects a clear focus on ensuring prevention, early detection, treatment, and support are accessible and equitable for all New Zealanders. The programme features keynote presentations, interactive panel discussions, and skills-based workshops highlighting innovative research and practical strategies. The event opens on 18 June with two optional half-day masterclasses — Skin Surgery and Advanced Dermoscopy — followed by the main conference on 19–20 June.

[A call for abstracts](#) is also open, with submissions closing on **27 March 2026**. We encourage clinicians and researchers to submit their work.



RACS Scholarships and Grants Program

RACS Scholarships and Grants Program is offering Research Scholarships and Learning and Development Grants for 2027

Applications open 3 March and close 14 April 2026.

[Find out more](#)

ESCP 21st Scientific Meeting – Prague

The European Society of Coloproctology invites you to join them for their 21st Scientific Meeting, in Prague, Czech Republic, on 23-25 September 2026.

This year's conference will feature

keynotes from distinguished surgeons, cutting-edge research sessions and opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration in an inspiring setting.

Registrations are now open, and abstracts

can still be submitted through to 14 April 2026. Visit www.escp.eu.com for the latest updates on conference registration, accommodation, program, speakers, and more.



2026 Foundation for Surgery AoNZ End of Financial Year Campaign

The Foundation for Surgery is striving for a world where all children, families and communities can access quality surgical care when they need it most.

The Foundation for Surgery has launched its 2026 End of Financial Year Campaign with an aim to raise donations to assist with funding the many projects the Foundation supports.

The past year, thanks to the generosity of supporters like you, we have been able to continue funding the Te Rau Poka – Māori Surgical Trainee Academy; the position of the Māori Surgical Director; a number of grants for Māori and Australian First Nation trainees and medical students to attend the RACS Annual Scientific Congress. The Foundation has also been able to continue supporting many initiatives undertaken through the RACS Global Health program including deployment of visiting medical teams to Indo-Pacific nations to provide essential training to health professionals in these nations and perform critical surgical procedures.

Why your support matters

At the Foundation for Surgery, your donation makes an impact and assists the Foundation's mission to address critical surgical need in disadvantaged communities, improving health equity and supporting research and training that advances surgical practice and patient care.

Here's how your donation will help:

- **\$100,000** will enable the purchase of an equipment kit for Global Health visiting medical teams.
- **\$50,000** will cover the costs of running the Te Rau Poka: Māori Surgical Trainee Academy for half a year.
- **\$30,000** will support 4 medical educators to travel to the region to train



2025 Te Rā Tuhura / Careers Day at Te ORA Māori Medical Practitioners Annual General Meeting (part of the Te Rau Poka program)

Pacific clinicians to increase clinical confidence, knowledge and skills.

- **\$20,000** will provide funds to ensure that our clinical training programs can provide current versions of training manuals and replacement of training materials required for training simulation.
- **\$25,000** will enable 2 Indo-Pacific surgeons to undertake training such as CCriSP or EMST with RACS in Australia. This enables them to return home and boost the number of local faculty able to train locally.
- **\$10,000** will support two regional surgical registrars to return to Fiji to sit their final exams.
- **\$5,000** will support one recipient of the Indigenous Health ASC grants.

Your generosity is greatly appreciated and ensures that RACS can keep helping where it is needed most. [Please make a donation today](#). Select the End of Financial Year option in the Campaign drop down menu.

Together, we can achieve more

An end-of-financial-year donation before 30 March will not only help us continue this important work — a donation above \$5 is also tax-deductible. Your contribution today ensures we can start the new financial year stronger, better prepared, and ready to support those who rely on us.

Together, we can create lasting change.



RACS Global Health volunteer team in action in Tuvalu