
International Day of the Elimination of Violence Against Women

25 November 2019

The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) has called for a renewed focus on the prevention of domestic violence, as Monday 25 November marks International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

Associate Professor Mukherjee, Deputy Chair of the NSW RACS Committee, said that violence can affect people regardless of their gender, but women were particularly overrepresented in cases of domestic violence.

“The highest burden of disease on women's health in Australia is due to domestic violence which is higher than any other risk factors, over alcohol or smoking. This is far higher in the indigenous population and these health impacts are preventable.” Associate Professor Mukherjee said.

Despite the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence and much Federal and State investment to combat it, it is difficult to see a significant reduction in its incidence.

Associate Professor Mukherjee was a finalist in the 2019 NSW Premier's Woman of the Year Award and is a passionate advocate for gender equality in medicine. She was recently involved in updating RACS' position paper on domestic violence which she hopes will provide guidance to surgeons in cases of dealing with patients that they suspect have been involved in incidents of domestic violence.

“It is important that we provide the right support programs that help to identify and support domestic violence victims, including training programs that improve the confidence and competency of health professionals to identify and care for people experiencing domestic violence.

Trauma surgeons see the common physical injuries and psychological signs that are observed on domestic violence victims. The role of the treating practitioner is to not only care for the immediate injury, but screen for other related health risks and sensitively provide information and identify resources in their hospital and in the wider community which can support victims. There are also no clear support pathways in our training schemes to support fellows and trainees who are themselves subject to domestic violence.

“Through our updated position paper, we hope to be able to provide guidance to clinicians about the potential presentations of domestic violence observe on victims, and about how they should approach suspected domestic violence cases.

“RACS is working closely with universities and other institutions to introduce education at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. As yet there is no dedicated educational platform in the surgical training program specific to domestic violence, however I am hopeful that this is something we can achieve in the future.”

Associate Professor Mukherjee also called for tighter alcohol controls, and said that there was no denying the link between alcohol and domestic violence.

“There have been numerous studies highlighting the link between the two, including a recent report released by the [Australian Institute of Criminology](#).

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“So far this year we have seen landmark reforms passed in the Northern Territory which have the potential to significantly reduce alcohol related harm so it is good to see progress being made, but at the same time we have seen the NSW Government winding back some of its world leading harm minimisation measures. Our message to governments is to ensure that they support evidence-based initiatives and that harm minimisation remains their number one priority.”

ENDS.

About the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS): RACS is the leading advocate for surgical standards, professionalism and surgical education in Australia and New Zealand. The College is a not-for-profit organisation that represents more than 7000 surgeons and 1300 surgical trainees and International Medical Graduates. RACS also supports healthcare and surgical education in the Asia-Pacific region and is a substantial funder of surgical research. There are nine surgical specialties in Australasia being: Cardiothoracic surgery, General surgery, Neurosurgery, Orthopaedic surgery, Otolaryngology Head-and-Neck surgery, Paediatric surgery, Plastic and Reconstructive surgery, Urology and Vascular surgery.

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