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JOINT STATEMENT

Medical Colleges call for urgent freeze to all non-critical elective surgery

The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS), the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA), the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG) and the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists (RANZCO) are calling for a stop to all elective surgery, except urgent cases, as we prepare to meet the looming public health emergency which threatens to overwhelm our hospital system.

RACS President Dr Tony Sparnon stated that continuing non-emergency elective surgery is unnecessarily putting patients and staff at risk of infection with the coronavirus.

“There must be a consistent national approach, which prioritises the health, safety and wellbeing of all patients and medical staff, given the dramatic escalation in COVID-19 cases. All non-urgent elective surgery in public hospitals should be cancelled. Private hospitals should be mobilised to accept urgent surgery.”

ANZCA President Dr Rod Mitchell warned that “the continuation of elective surgery is consuming vital reserves of medicines and other important hospital resources. It is also reducing the time available for doctors and nurses to prepare for the management of the expected large numbers of critically ill patients.

Personal protective equipment is already in critical short supply and must be conserved. This is essential to secure the safety of our health workforce,” he said.

RANZCOG President, Dr Vijay Roach said: “Critical gynaecological procedures, including abortion, and all care during birth, including caesarean sections, should continue as usual.”

RANZCO President, Associate Professor Heather Mack emphasised “urgent, sight-preserving, eye surgery needs to continue.”

All surgical groups will consult and identify critical procedures that cannot be postponed. The Colleges reaffirm their respect for the role of the Australian and New Zealand governments, health departments and health administrators in coordinating responses to this public health crisis. We reiterate our commitment to collaborating to provide the best possible care for our community.

Ends.

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