ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

MEDIA RELEASE

Surgical mortality rates remain low

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Victoria continues to be one of the safest places in the country to have surgery with continuing low death rates, according to the latest Victorian Audit of Surgical Mortality (VASM) report.

In the past financial year, 805 clinical reviews were conducted for cases where patients died while under the care of a surgeon.

The audit found:

- The majority of surgical deaths in this audited series occurred in elderly patients with underlying health problems, admitted as an emergency with an acute life threatening condition often requiring surgery;
- The actual cause of death was often non-preventable and linked to their pre-existing health status in that the cause of death frequently mirrored the pre-existing illness;
- From more than 632,000 surgical procedures there were 1,945 deaths reported to VASM, representing 0.3 per cent;
- 82.6 per cent of deaths were emergency surgeries;
- Unplanned return to the operating theatre, often necessitated by a complication of the initial procedure, is associated with increased risk of death.

Clinical Director of VASM Philip McCahy said the audit aims to monitor surgical safety, address process errors and identify significant trends in surgical care.

“The audit enables surgeons and hospitals to address areas of concern and to further improve surgical practice,” Mr McCahy said.

“Feedback on patient management is formally directed to the treating surgeons and is also disseminated for their ongoing education through workshops, seminars, and scientific publications.”

VASM 2016-17 made nine recommendations to improve the quality and safety of surgical care in Victoria, and hospital performance results have been prepared for the state’s lead agency on quality and safety, Safer Care Victoria.

The 2018 annual report contains clinical information on 8,375 deaths reported over the past five years. Of these deaths, 5,348 have gone through the audit process. The remaining cases are still under review and will be included in next year’s annual report.

All Victorian hospitals providing surgical services are part of the audit process. VASM is managed by the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons and supported by Safer Care Victoria, the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the Australian Orthopaedic Association.

The report is available at **www.surgeons.org/VASM**

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