



## **Significant advances in breast cancer treatment waiting times**

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New Zealand surgeons are reporting significant advances in efforts to ensure timely access to breast cancer treatment, delegates to the 82<sup>nd</sup> Annual Scientific Congress of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons have been told.

Following similar recommendations in the United Kingdom, the New Zealand cancer working group is recommending 14 calendar days to first specialist appointment, 31 days to diagnosis, and 62 days to treatment. In each of these categories, a compliance rate of 90% is the target.

Delegates to the ASC were told of a study undertaken to quantify current waiting times and identify barriers to the efficient management of patients with breast cancer. Data on all breast cancer patients referred from July 2011 to July 2012 were collected. Over this period, the Counties Manukau District Health Board (CMDHB) breast clinic diagnosed and treated 677 new cases of breast cancer. A total of 267 patients were eligible for analysis in the study period.

Study co-author Dr Garth Poole reported that 59% of patients received their first service appointment within 14 days of referral (median 10.5 days), 80% received a diagnosis within 31 days (median 12 days) and 78% of patients received definitive treatment within 62 days (median 43 days).

“Barriers to timely care included issue associated with additional imaging, comorbidities, immediate reconstructive choices and patient preference,” Dr Poole said.

“While current breast cancer treatment waiting times are not yet meeting the proposed guidelines, the median waiting time may be of more relevance when assessing the performance of treating institutions.

“We are excited about this initiative and are confident that we can comply once it becomes policy,” Dr Poole said.

Approximately 1200 surgeons from New Zealand, Australia and around the world are attending the ASC, which runs from 6 to 10 May and is being held at Auckland’s Skycity/Crowne Plaza Convention Centre.

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