



Excessive surgical fees unethical and inappropriate

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The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) is highly concerned at the amount of reported out-of-pocket costs being incurred by patients in the health-care sector.

RACS President Professor Michael Grigg said that whilst there had been substantial improvement in the last five years, recent reports were still damaging to the health system and to the standing of surgeons and the surgical profession.

“Although government data shows that almost 90 per cent of medical services in the private sector last year had no associated costs to patients we are still seeing reports in the media of excessive and even extortionate fees,” Professor Grigg said.

“These stories continue to affect confidence in private health care, private hospitals, the surgical profession and surgeons,” he said.

RACS believes that extortionate fees, where they are manifestly excessive and bear little if any relationship to utilisation of skills, time or resources, are exploitative and unethical. As such, they are in breach of the College’s Code of Conduct and will be dealt with by the College.

However, Professor Grigg said that the biggest issue to address was to ensure that patients and referring doctors were more fully informed about possible fees.

“This requires far better disclosure of fees whilst still being compliant with the Trade Practices Act, as interpreted by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC),” Professor Grigg said.

RACS is working actively with the ACCC to see how this sharing of information can be accelerated.

“Hopefully, the current Senate Committee reporting on out-of-pocket costs will highlight the imperatives of better disclosure of all fees in the health sector,” Professor Grigg said.

“Having patients as fully informed as possible is always the best way to address an issue such as this.”

The College says that patients have every right to not only know the fees they are likely to be charged but also to be made aware of the alternatives.

RACS says any patient facing potentially excessive out of pocket costs should discuss the issue further with their general practitioner and if appropriate, seek a second opinion and another quotation.