



## **Mental health - and how surgeons are improving theirs**

**Wednesday 19 November, 2014**

Surgeons from the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) are meeting in Sydney tonight as part of NSW Surgeons' Month to discuss the state of mental health among surgical specialists, and how to address and improve mental wellbeing in their profession.

NSW RACS Chair Dr Mary Langcake said a *beyondblue* study conducted in 2013 showed that one in ten doctors had experienced suicidal thoughts in the previous 12 months.

"As surgeons our primary concern is to ensure the public has access to world class surgical care, but we also have an obligation to focus on our own health and wellbeing so we can deliver that care," Dr Langcake said.

"Doctors are under a huge amount of stress. They also appear to be more resilient to the negative impacts of poor mental health and may try to 'tough it out' by themselves.

"Mandatory reporting of 'notifiable conduct' by all health professionals is now required by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency.

"But uncertainty about the need for a health practitioner to make a report about a colleague who presents with a mental illness has led to reluctance among some doctors, including surgeons, to seek help.

"Western Australia is the only jurisdiction where it is clear that a health practitioner can legally keep a consultation with a colleague on mental health issues confidential.

"My message to all surgeons, students and other health professionals is simple: we are all human, it is ok to seek help, in fact we have a duty of care to look after ourselves," Dr Langcake said.

Surgical trainees in particular are likely to experience higher levels of stress and mental health problems, and the transition from study to work may be a particularly difficult time when Trainees are in theatre and also taking examinations.

"I encourage all health professionals and students to call the NSW Doctor's Health Advisory Service on (02) 9437 6552 or *beyondblue* on 1300 22 4636 if they are experiencing problems with their health," Dr Langcake said.

Both services are confidential 24 hour referral, advice and support services, and callers do not need to provide their name. Visit the [Doctor's Health Advisory Service website](#), or [beyondblue's website](#).

**Media inquiries: Greg Meyer, Manager Communications & Advocacy  
0429 028 933 or (03) 9249 1263**

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# MEDIA RELEASE



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to view the full program for NSW Surgeons' Month.

## **About the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS)**

RACS is the leading advocate for surgical standards, professionalism and surgical education in New Zealand and Australia. 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. The College represents 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.

[www.surgeons.org](http://www.surgeons.org)

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