Bariatric surgery guidelines in Australia lack consistency

Friday 16 October, 2015
There is little uniformity among Australian regional guidelines when it comes to publicly-funded bariatric surgery policy and variable consistency among national guidelines, according to a presentation today at the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) VicTas Annual Surgical Meeting in Hobart.

Researchers at the Menzies Institute for Medical Research conducted a review of bariatric surgery policies and guidelines from each state and territory and compared each in relation to their origins, level of guidance on patient eligibility and priority as well as recommendations for patient care. National guidelines were also compared with the UK and the US.

The Review found that recommendations differed on patient eligibility, with none of the state documents mentioning re-operative bariatric or body-contouring surgery.

The presentation also referred to limited guidance on the prioritisation of eligible patients and gastric banding adjustments.

“Policies and guidelines on publicly-funded bariatric surgery are highly variable across Australia and at times inconsistent with national guidelines,” lead author Melanie Sharman said.

“These findings have implications for policy research and practice and are particularly important for a public health system that has limited resources and where there is inequitable access to this service,” Ms Sharman said.

RACS is concerned about the rising issue of obesity and earlier this year developed a position paper on equitable access to weight loss surgery by publicly funding bariatric surgery was one of the recommendations - others included:

- RACS supporting the development of national plans in Australia and New Zealand to coordinate efforts to reduce obesity
- RACS recommending the use of national bariatric surgery registries in Australia and New Zealand
- RACS recommending that health services should be adequately equipped to deal with the growing number of obese patients.

The VicTas Annual Surgical Meeting is being held at the Hotel Grand Chancellor in Hobart and will run from Friday 16 October to Saturday 17 October.

Read the full program.

About the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS)
RACS is the leading advocate for surgical standards, professionalism and surgical education in Australia and New Zealand. 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. There are 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.

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