Acute appendicitis possible indicator of colorectal cancer in older adults

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Older patients with appendicitis may have an increased risk of colorectal cancer, delegates to the 85th Annual Scientific Congress (ASC) of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) have been told.

These findings arise from research conducted by Dr Rebecca Shine, a Registrar of General Surgery, alongside colleagues at the Bay of Plenty DHB.

“With colorectal cancer, if it can be detected and treated early, then the outcome for the patient improves dramatically,” Dr Shine said.

“Unfortunately, early detection can prove difficult as most patients only present when the colorectal cancer is at a more advanced stage.”

New Zealand has among the highest rates of colorectal cancer in the Western world with approximately 2800 new cases every year, and between 1100 and 1200 deaths.

According to the research conducted by Dr Shine and her colleagues, the presence of acute appendicitis may be an indicator, which can help detect colorectal cancer at an earlier stage.

“The findings of our research suggest that patients 45 years and over with appendicitis are more than six times as likely to have a colorectal carcinoma as those without.

“For patients between 45 and 60 years of age with appendicitis, there is a seventeen fold increase in this risk.”

“Acute appendicitis may therefore be an indicator that a patient has colorectal cancer, which potentially could result in detection earlier.”

“Our recommendation is that all patients aged 45 years and above should be considered for a full colonic investigation following a diagnosis of appendicitis, regardless of histology or preoperative imaging.”

The RACS Annual Scientific Conference is being held between 2-6 May in Brisbane.

The conference brings together the top surgical and medical minds from across New Zealand, Australia, and the rest of the world.

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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