Surgeons can benefit from Whatsapp

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Communication among members in a surgical team is a vital part of patient care. Traditional communication like the paging system can be disruptive during patient assessment or operations.

Dr Ronald Yuen, who is pursuing a career in general surgery, has presented the results of a study of suitable communications tools for surgery to the Annual Scientific Congress (ASC) of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) in Adelaide.

“Newer methods of communication such as Whatsapp group communication are becoming more common within surgical teams and the aim of this study was to analyse their efficiency and effectiveness,” Dr Yuen said.

A prospective mixed-methods study was conducted in a major NSW teaching hospital.

Members within a general surgical team, made up of an intern, a resident and a senior resident medical Officer (SRMO) used a WhatsApp chat-group as a communication adjunct in addition to traditional methods of communication over a period of three months.

“The communication was broken down into three categories: administrative, clinical and general updates.

“The initiator and receiver of communication were compared for response times and communication type.

“Over 550 hours of communication was recorded generating 574 communication events.

“The intern was the primary contributor with 155 events, followed by the registrar, SRMO and resident.

“The registrar initiated most instruction-giving and requests for updates whilst the intern asked the most clinical questions and updated the team with patient progress.

“The average response time was significantly more user dependent rather than pertaining to the topic of communication.

“While there was no significant difference in response time, Whatsapp provided a quick and effective method of communication among surgical team members without interruption to clinical work,” Dr Yuen said.

Up to 1500 surgeons are meeting in the Adelaide Convention Centre this week for a series of workshops, discussions, Plenaries and masterclasses across a broad range of surgical issues.

About 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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