MEDIA RELEASE

Nurse-led follow up safe and effective for colorectal cancer patients

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The introduction of nurse-led follow up services after surgery has the potential to reduce the burden on New Zealand’s health system. A recent study has suggested that a shift from consultant-led to nurse-led colon cancer follow up enables patients to be followed up safely and effectively while alleviating the workload of surgeons.

Colorectal cancer is common in New Zealand. Evidence suggests that follow up programs improve survival but can overwhelm a service, affecting the ability to see new referrals. The Colorectal nurse specialist role was first introduced in 2013 in Tauranga hospital in New Zealand to cope with this demand.

“We have noticed that there are a lot more colorectal cancer patients requiring follow up – from our perspective [nurse-led follow up] is good because the patients receive effective follow up without overwhelming consultant surgeon clinics,” says Dr Mei Sze Lee.

Patients who were followed up by a nurse specialist are guided by standard colorectal follow up protocols. All patient details were recorded prospectively. These were compared with patients who were followed up in a consultant surgeon clinic for the achievement of certain key performance indicators.

A total of 580 colorectal surgeries were performed over the period over the study period for both malignant and benign pathologies. 229 surgeries were colonic cancer resections.

Preliminary results show just over 60% patients were referred to colorectal nurse led clinic for surveillance. More than half of these patients had at least one CT surveillance scan (54% vs 30%, p<0.001) and achieved their routine 3 monthly Carcinoembryonic antigen (CEA) (55% vs 37%, p<0.05) compared with a consultant lead follow up clinic. Patients who were followed up by consultant also tended to have a shorter surveillance period (11 vs 23 months).

“As patients have been followed up by nurses in the nurse specialist clinic, the surgeon has the ability to see more new patients in their clinic, reducing waiting time for the first specialist assessment.” says Dr Lee.

The study demonstrated that nurses were able to conduct these post-surgery follow ups safely and effectively and could help free up a service and allow a hospital to see new referrals.

Tauranga is the one of the few regional hospitals with a colorectal nurse specialist running a nurse led follow up service.

“The majority of regional hospitals do not have a nurse specialist role and if this [initiative] can be introduced to all regional hospitals, this will certainly help with demand on follow up service” says Dr Lee.

Dr Lee’s poster will be presented at the upcoming Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) 87th Annual Scientific Congress (ASC) this year at the Sydney International Convention Centre from 7-11 May.

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For more information about the RACS Annual Scientific Congress please visit: https://asc.surgeons.org/

About the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS)

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