MEDIA RELEASE

The pitfalls of cosmetic tourism

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A review has discovered botched overseas cosmetic procedures is increasing the burden on Australia’s already stretched public health system.

Cosmetic tourism is a booming $300 million-dollar industry with more than 15,000 Australians travelling overseas for cosmetic surgery each year.

While the vast majority of patients return satisfied, a worrying number return with postoperative complications that can leave them permanently disfigured and relying on Australia’s public health system for help.

Dr Olivia Perotti studied patients who developed postoperative complications from overseas cosmetic breast procedures who then presented to Western Health (Melbourne) between July 2017 and December 2017 and discovered some worrying trends.

“One patient had nipple necrosis and an exposed, infected implant; while another a had culture-proven rapidly-growing multi-resistant bacteria,” Dr Perotti said.

“A separate patient had bilateral breast implant removal and mastopexy overseas but was given half of an implant after being told the remaining part couldn’t be removed. She returned to Australia with an infection and bilateral capsule calcification.”

Dr Perotti said the majority of Australian patients who travel overseas for cosmetic procedures don’t fully understand the risks.

“No is often a key factor when Australians contemplate cosmetic surgery overseas and are often drawn deals in South East Asia,” Dr Perotti said.

“Often patients are promised the world, but it’s the unknowns that are scary. What are the surgeons qualifications? Is the anaesthetist safe and qualified? Are the surgical instruments sterilised? Does the hospital adhere to WHO guidelines for surgical safety?

“Patients unwittingly take serious health risks by undergoing cosmetic procedures overseas and it may result in Australia’s public health system paying the bill if something goes wrong.

“This can cost upwards of $15,000 per patient in addition to a lengthy stay in hospital. In addition to potentially disfiguring outcomes for elective procedures,”

Dr Perotti will be presenting a poster at the Royal Australasian College of Surgeon’s 87th Annual Scientific Congress which is being held in Sydney between 7-11 May. The congress brings together some of the top surgical and medical minds from across New Zealand, Australia, and the rest of the world.

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

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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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