ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

MEDIA RELEASE

New Zealand Surgeons Support Trial of Physician Assistants

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The New Zealand National Board of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons has endorsed a government initiative to undertake a pilot scheme using physician assistants in the Department of Surgery at Middlemore Hospital.

Board Chair Jean-Claude Theis says RACS (NZ) believes the initiative will likely help surgeons cope with their increasing workload by delegating some tasks to the new assistants – hence freeing up time for them to do more clinical work and training of junior doctors.

"This new category of health workers will not be taking over the duties of doctors, however we believe this is an opportunity to free up senior doctors and enhance the training of junior doctors by giving them more time to attend teaching sessions" he said.

"The Medical Training Board has identified the training of junior doctors as deficient and the Medical Council wants to see some changes."

Mr Theis said the College supported a reduction in the vast amount of paper work being undertaken by junior doctors to allow more time for teaching and learning.

"We see physician assistants as being part of the healthcare team and, as the name implies, they are assistants to physicians and will be acting under authority delegated to them," he said.

Mr Theis said the College had had good feedback on a similar pilot undertaken in Adelaide that had support from both junior and senior doctors as well as nurses.

"We need to move ahead and build a health workforce that will deliver services in a smarter way so that New Zealanders will to continue to have access to a world-class public health system in the future. This new initiative may go some way to making this happen," he said.

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