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MEDIA RELEASE

Laparoscopic surgery and the treatment of rectal cancer

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Laparoscopic colorectal surgery has been widely embraced by Australasian surgeons and may lead to less pain, faster recovery and better cosmesis for patients, but several concerns need to be addressed before its use is routinely adopted for all procedures, according to an article in the latest issue of the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Surgery*.

Colorectal surgeons, Mr Eugene Ong of Melbourne and Dr Andrew Stevenson of The Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital, surveyed members of the Colorectal Surgical Society of Australia and New Zealand. Of the 123 surgeons who responded, the vast majority (>90%) practiced some form of "key-hole" surgery. "Compared to a similar group of surgeons in Great Britain, Australasia appears to have had a far wider adoption of laparoscopic colorectal surgery," Mr Ong said.

In the challenging field of rectal cancer, they report that most upper and mid-rectal cancers were being treated with a keyhole procedure. However, when it comes to performing "total mesorectal excision" (TME) surgery, the technique required for the treatment of low rectal cancers, the majority of surgeons still utilised a large "open" incision. Nonetheless, more than half of the surgeons surveyed intended to commence treating these tumours using a minimally invasive technique in the near future.

"Most surgeons believe that there are improved short-term outcomes with laparoscopic surgery and that it is equal in terms of cancer outcomes when compared with the open procedure," Mr Ong said. He identified areas of concern as controlling blood loss, technical challenges when treating very low rectal cancers, as well as resource utilisation and cost. The Australasian trial investigating rectal cancer treatment using the keyhole technique, "A La CaRT" (Australasian Laparoscopic Cancer of the Rectum Trial), is now underway to address these issues with co-author Dr Stevenson as the lead investigator.

"Laparoscopic rectal surgery is now widely practised by Australasian colorectal surgeons and it is projected to increase in the near future," Mr Ong said. However, with only 10% of surgeons routinely performing laparoscopic TME, he stated it might be difficult to credential surgeons in this technically challenging field, or to apply the results of trials such as "A La CaRT" to the rest of the surgical community.

The *ANZ Journal of Surgery*, established more than 70 years and published by Wiley-Blackwell, is the pre-eminent surgical journal published in Australia, New Zealand and the South-East Asian region. The Journal is dedicated to the promotion of outstanding surgical practice, and research of contemporary and international interest.

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