



ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

# MEDIA RELEASE

## Surgeons warn of looming workforce crisis

**Friday 7 October, 2011**

Access to world class surgical care in Australia is threatened by a looming workforce shortage, the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons has warned. Unless there is a substantial increase in the number of graduating surgeons, Australia faces a surgical workforce crisis within the next fifteen years.

Modelling done as part of a College report on the future surgical workforce indicates that in addition to the 184 new surgeons currently graduating each year, a further 80 will have to graduate alongside them.

College Vice President, Mr Keith Mutimer said that to avoid this crisis governments will have to move quickly to ensure adequate training posts are in place and that serious consideration needs to be given to expanding surgical training opportunities in the private health sector.

“This increase needs to be initiated now or, with the passing of each year, the number of active surgeons will fall further below the required level, and the number of new surgeons required will steadily rise,” Mr Mutimer said.

“The average cost of training one surgical trainee, if he or she is expected to do 200 operative cases per year, is conservatively estimated at \$903,000. Further expenditure is required for educational infrastructure and costs incurred by the supervisor. It follows therefore that if Australians are to continue to receive the standard of surgical care they currently receive, additional expenditure of at least \$72 million per annum is needed on surgical training alone. But for the fact that most training is done pro bono by surgeons, this figure would be even higher,” he said.

While the current surgeon per population ratio is adequately and safely servicing the Australian population, this population is expected to increase and its average age to rise, resulting in an increasing workload for surgeons. This will be exacerbated by the fact that a large number of surgeons are themselves approaching the age of retirement.

The hours worked per week by surgeons may also fall over time as a result of concerns regarding safe working hours and the possibility that the next generation of surgeons will seek enhanced work life balance.

Another factor affecting workforce supply into the future is the federal government’s stated objective of reducing Australia’s reliance on International Medical Graduates, quoting reductions of up to 95%.

“The logistics and expense of meeting the need for increased surgical training represents an unprecedented challenge to Australian governments, hospitals and Fellows of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons,” Mr Mutimer said.

The surgical workforce projection report is available at:  
[www.surgeons.org/media/504711/rpt\\_racs\\_workforce\\_projection\\_to\\_2025.pdf](http://www.surgeons.org/media/504711/rpt_racs_workforce_projection_to_2025.pdf).

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