



ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

MEDIA RELEASE

Plastic Surgery – a misunderstood specialty

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Several factors explain widespread misconceptions about the work of plastic surgeons, an article in the latest issue of the *ANZ Journal of Surgery* reveals.

A study conducted by surgeons at Melbourne's Alfred Hospital examined popular views of the surgical specialty and found very few members of the general public were aware of the scope of work performed by plastic surgeons.

Primary author of the study Dr Patwinder Gill said this was probably due in part to a general misunderstanding of specialist titles and a lack of education regarding the field.

“As the scope of plastic surgery is vast and ever changing, few members of the public are aware of the services provided by plastic surgeons,” Dr Gill said.

“Previously published research also reveals that general practitioners, the first port of call for patients accessing the services of plastic surgeons, have a limited understanding of the field. Although better informed than the general public, GPs were not able to correctly identify many of the procedures fundamental to the field of plastic surgery,” she said.

As there have been no studies in Australia to assess the public's level of understanding of the specialty, Dr Gill and her co-authors conducted a cross-sectional study of members of the public systematically selected from the White Pages. Participants were excluded if they or anyone they knew had prior interactions with a plastic surgeon. The study involved 213 participants. They were asked to nominate their choice of surgeon in three different scenarios: breast reduction, excision of skin cancer from the facial region and hand trauma.

Just 19% of participants would consult a plastic surgeon across the three clinical scenarios. Dermatologists (47%) were chosen over plastic surgeons (24%) to excise skin cancers from the face. Breast surgeons (53%) were chosen over plastic surgeons (23%) to perform breast reduction surgery, and in the case of hand trauma 58% of participants would consult a hand surgeon while only 10% would consult a plastic surgeon.

“The findings are in line with studies done overseas and indicate that there is a widespread misunderstanding of the extraordinary breadth of work done in the field of plastic surgery,” Dr Gill said. “There is clearly a need to raise awareness of the specialty, not least among general practitioners. They need to be aware of the scope of the specialty, enabling them to give fully informed advice to patients and ensuring referrals to the most appropriate surgical specialists in a timely fashion.”

The *ANZ Journal of Surgery*, now in its 80th year 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.

Media inquiries: Michael Barrett, Manager Media & Public Relations
0429 028 933 or (03) 9249 1263

Visit: www.anzjsurg.com