



The future of New Zealand's plastic surgery workforce

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A substantial proportion of New Zealand is at risk of increasingly inadequate access to specialist plastic surgery services, delegates to the 81st Annual Scientific Congress (ASC) of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons have been told.

Professor Swee Tan, a plastic surgeon from Hutt Hospital in Wellington, told delegates that New Zealand's plastic surgery workforce is a small and strongly collegial group providing public service from six units.

"There has, however, been little analysis of whether the workforce is adequate to meet the needs of the New Zealand population currently or in the future," Professor Tan said. "This is why a study of the current workforce, its adequacy and future requirements, was undertaken."

The research carried out by Professor Tan and his colleagues analysed current workforce data, workforce activities, population statistics and population modelling to predict existing and future unmet need for plastic surgery services. The New Zealand workforce was compared with international and quality benchmarks. Regional variation of the workforce was analysed and future supply was analysed by examination of the College's Surgical Education and Training (SET) program.

Professor Tan concluded that the current New Zealand workforce of 53 plastic surgeons is both inadequate and mal-distributed and he identified areas of current and emerging need.

"By 2027, 2.9 million New Zealanders will be dependent on either visiting plastic surgery services or on travelling to a regional provider unless regional development occurs," Professor Tan said. "A tipping point will be reached when regional demand is at such a level that visiting services become insufficient to meet local demand. Proper workforce planning, as well as a new model for service delivery, is required to provide equitable access to sustainable and efficient services of quality."

"Transition from a centralised hub, networked and integrated with new services closer to populations requires strong clinical leadership and political support and facilitation," Professor Tan said.

This year's ASC, with the theme 'The Making of a Surgeon', runs from 6 to 10 May and is being held at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre. Approximately 2,500 delegates from Australia, New Zealand and around the world are attending.

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