



The outreach work of General Surgeons in rural practice

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General Surgeons working in larger rural centres should be encouraged to include outreach services to surrounding smaller towns in their practice, delegates to the 81st Annual Scientific Congress (ASC) of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons have been told.

Dr Nicole Campbell, a Surgical Trainee based in Launceston, told delegates there is little published data regarding the caseloads of General Surgeons working in rural Australia and conducting outreach services as part of their practice. "The aim of this study was to describe the workload of surgeons working in a rural centre with outreach practices in order to determine the required skills mix for prospective surgeons," Dr Campbell said.

"A retrospective review of surgical procedures carried out by two surgeons over five years working from a base in Wangaratta, Victoria, with outreach services to Benalla, Bright and Mansfield was undertaken. Data was extracted from surgeon records using Medicare Benefits Schedule item numbers.

"A total of 18,029 procedures were performed over 5 years, with 15 per cent of these performed in peripheral hospitals as part of an outreach service. A full range of general surgical procedures were undertaken, with endoscopies accounting for 32 per cent of procedures. In addition, vascular procedures and emergency craniotomies were also performed. The majority of procedures undertaken at peripheral centres were minor procedures, with only 2 laparotomies performed at these centres over 5 years.

Dr Campbell concluded that General Surgeons working in rural centres are required to have a broad range of skills and be able to undertake a large number of procedures. And at a time when it remains difficult to attract and retain surgeons in rural Australia, surgeons working in larger rural centres should be encouraged to add outreach services to their practice.

"Outreach services to surrounding communities increase service provision to these towns, allow local hospitals to remain open and allow local medical and nursing staff to maintain skills," she 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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