
Study points to higher amputation rate amongst Indigenous Australians

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A North Queensland study has found that Indigenous Australians are more likely than non-Indigenous Australians to require lower limb amputations as a result of chronic diseases, such as diabetes.

The study, conducted at the Queensland Research Centre for Peripheral Vascular Disease, retrospectively analysed data from the Townsville Hospital and Health Service over a 16-year period. It then compared the rate and characteristics of Indigenous Australians undergoing major amputations with non-Indigenous Australians.

Dr Tejas Singh, a surgical resident medical officer at the hospital, will present the findings of the study to the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons' Annual Scientific Congress in Sydney. He said that the numbers in the study were concerning.

"We found an increasing incidence in the number of major amputations in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians between 2000-2007 and 2008-2015.

"Overall the rates of major amputations in Indigenous and non-Indigenous patients with diabetes were 291.9 and 70.1 per 100,000 population respectively.

"We also found that Indigenous patients with diabetes were almost seventeen times more likely to undergo a major amputation compared to those Indigenous patients without diabetes."

While a comparable study was conducted in Western Australia in 2010, which recorded similar results, Dr Singh said that this was the first time such a study had investigated clinical outcomes after major amputation.

"The study also looked at clinical outcomes of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians after major amputation. There is no other study that we know of like this. It was concerning to see that Indigenous Australians had a higher mortality rate."

Dr Singh said that besides the two studies there was very little other research that has been conducted in this area. He believes that further research was warranted and could prove useful in determining future health priorities and policy.

"I don't think there has been as much awareness generated regarding lower limb amputations in the Indigenous population, compared to other health risks, such as renal disease and heart disease.

"While it is great to see information in these areas, we would specifically like to see more information available and publicised about the correlation between diabetes and lower limb amputations.

In particular Dr Singh said that he would like to see further research identifying effective interventions which can help address the high major amputation rates for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in North Queensland.

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Dr Singh will be presenting at the upcoming Royal Australasian College of Surgeons' 87th Annual Scientific Congress which is being held in Sydney between 7-11 May. The congress brings together some of the top surgical and medical minds from across New Zealand, Australia, and the rest of the world.

For more information about the Annual Scientific Congress please visit: <https://asc.surgeons.org/>

About the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS)

RACS is the leading advocate for surgical standards, professionalism and surgical education in Australia and New Zealand. The College is a not-for-profit organisation that represents more than 7000 surgeons and 1300 surgical trainees and International Medical Graduates. RACS also supports healthcare and surgical education in the Asia-Pacific region and is a substantial funder of surgical research. There are nine surgical specialties in Australasia being: Cardiothoracic surgery, General surgery, Neurosurgery, Orthopaedic surgery, Otolaryngology Head-and-Neck surgery, Paediatric surgery, Plastic and Reconstructive surgery, Urology and Vascular surgery.

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