
Surgeons committed to improving mesh patients' care

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The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) acknowledges the substantial harm suffered by New Zealand mesh patients and their families and is committed to helping make the changes necessary to improve mesh patients' care.

"The report of surgical mesh patients' stories, released today, is confronting and harrowing to read," says Nicola Hill, Chair of RACS' New Zealand National Board. "I commend everyone involved in this process; their honesty and insight has paved the way for significant change.

"One of the most common themes, that patients felt unheard, is something that I will be urging all members of our College to reflect deeply upon. For people, when they are most vulnerable, to feel their experiences are at best being downplayed and at worst disbelieved by the health professionals who are caring for them, is hugely concerning. We clearly have much work to do to regain the trust and respect of many mesh patients.

"This report sets out quite a clear path ahead for what needs to be done to meet the needs of patients who have suffered complications with mesh surgery. We support the development of a credentialing pathway for the expert use of mesh and recognise that this is already under way.

"We support the suggestion of more advocates to help patients navigate their way through the health system and speak on their behalf particularly at times when they are feeling weak and vulnerable." Nicola Hill says the report also indicates there is room for improvement around the whole area of informed consent. "We as surgeons have a responsibility to make sure that patients understand their options and the associated benefits and risks. The Medical Council's Statement on informed consent is the standard for all New Zealand doctors. RACS also has a comprehensive position paper on informed consent."

She says the report acknowledges that harm from mesh occurs within a complex system influenced by a range of conflicting demands including professional or personal viewpoints, regulations and financial considerations. "However, the patient is and must be always at the heart of everything we do. This report gives us pause for deep reflection on what we can do to improve the care of many mesh patients."

About RACS: RACS is the leading advocate for surgical standards, professionalism and surgical education in New Zealand and Australia in nine surgical specialties – 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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