



## **Surgeons call for more action on alcohol related violence in the NT**

**Thursday 24 February, 2016**

In the wake of the Queensland Government's decision to implement new laws aimed at reducing alcohol fueled violence, The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) has urged the Northern Territory government to adopt similar legislation.

The Queensland laws, which were passed by the state's parliament last week, include the introduction of a 1am one way door policy and 2am last drinks. They follow the New South Wales government's decision to implement similar measures in the Sydney CBD, which have led to a significant reduction in late night assaults since they were introduced in 2014.

It is estimated that the level of alcohol consumption by Territorians is easily the highest of any jurisdiction in the country. NT residents consume 13.73 litres of pure alcohol per year compared to the national average of 10.42 litres.

While the Northern Territory already has 3am lock-out restrictions, Dr John Crozier, Chair of the RACS Trauma Committee, said that earlier lock-out times and the introduction of a last drinks policy would further reduce the rate of assaults.

"Australian and international research demonstrates that for every additional hour of trading after midnight, there is a 16-20 per cent increase in assaults. Conversely, for every hour of reduced trading there is a 20 per cent reduction in assaults.

"In Sydney, non-domestic assaults have decreased by 32 per cent in Kings Cross and 26 per cent in the Sydney Central Business District (CBD) following the introduction of 3am last drinks and 1.30am lockouts in February 2014."

Dr Crozier's remarks follow earlier comments he made on Darwin radio this week, where a number of other medical representatives offered their support for these effective evidence based reasonable measures.

Mr Mahiban Thomas, RACS Fellow and Head of Maxillofacial and Head and Neck Surgery at the Royal Darwin Hospital (RDH), said that his observations over a long period of time highlighted a clear link between excessive alcohol consumption and late night assaults.

"Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays show a huge spike in the number of cases we see. Saturday alone accounts for 25% of all facial trauma at RDH."

"41% of all facial trauma comes from the Mitchell Street precinct, and 61% occurs between the hours of 11pm on Thursday night and 4am on Sunday mornings."

"The timelines of the fractures we see would indicate that a reduction in trading hours, especially during the small hours of the morning, would significantly reduce the number of assaults."

Dr Crozier urged both major parties to recognise the extent of alcohol related assaults in the NT, and to begin developing policies aimed at minimising the harm felt by the community.

“Ultimately it is surgeons and other medical professionals who see first-hand the extent of the problem. In an election year I encourage both the government and the opposition to consult the evidence base.

“It is increasingly showing that earlier closing times consistently reduce assaults and emergency department attendances, and are a crucial part of managing alcohol-related violence.”

**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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