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## **Obesity Epidemic Already Upon Us Say Medical Professionals**

**Thursday 27 October, 2016**

The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons has issued a dire warning to Australians and New Zealanders about their countries' weight problem, as alarming statistics highlight the prevalence of the problem in young people.

This warning comes as the Obesity Surgery Society of Australia and New Zealand (OSSANZ) holds its Annual Conference in Sydney starting today to discuss some of the more difficult areas of Bariatric Surgery and as the Committee of Presidents of Medical Colleges (CPMC) prepares to convene a National Health Summit on Obesity in Melbourne on 9 November to discuss ways in which obesity can be reduced.

According to projections, by 2025, more than one in four Australian children aged between five and seventeen will be considered overweight or obese. This is up from one in five at the turn of the century, with a clear trajectory towards a one in three figure.

The numbers are even worse in New Zealand, where the one in three figure will almost be reached by 2025, when it is expected approximately 32 per cent of children will be considered overweight or obese.

RACS Fellow and President of OSSANZ, Mr George Hopkins, said that the increase in Australia and New Zealand had reached crisis point.

"We often refer to the obesity epidemic as a ticking time bomb waiting to go off, but the reality is it already has. You don't have to spend long in any public shopping centre to work out how widespread it has become," Mr Hopkins said.

"This is having flow on effects for the rest of the health system. There are strong links between obesity and a myriad of other health problems, including type 2 diabetes, heart disease and certain types of cancers."

"Furthermore, obese people have a 50 -100 per cent increased risk of dying prematurely compared to people of normal weight."

Mr Hopkins works as a gastrointestinal surgeon in Brisbane, where he has performed weight loss surgery on thousands of patients. He says there had been a noticeable increase in the number of obese patients requiring surgery, but most startling has been the rise in the number of children.

"When I am required to operate on younger people it is usually after every other weight loss strategy has failed. Compared to when I first started working as a surgeon it is alarming how common it has become for people to require this sort of intervention at such a young age."

"With so many people now overweight this is not just placing an enormous strain on individuals, but it is also creating an untenable situation for our health system. There is only so much pressure it can take before it collapses."

"Childhood obesity is preventable, but something needs to change urgently. Weight loss surgery has proven to be an effective measure, but it should not be viewed as a silver bullet or a cure."

"We need to look right across the spectrum for how we are going to tackle this crisis, from education, to nutrition, to promoting more active lifestyles. Those figures are damning, clearly

what we are doing at the moment isn't working.”

**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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