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## Inter-hospital transfers: suitability of care versus delay

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Inter-hospital transfers have the potential of delaying emergency surgery, prolonging the patient's stay or worse, can be fatal, according to a study featured in the latest issue of the *Australia and New Zealand Journal of Surgery (ANZJS)*, the peer-review publication of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS).

Conducted by Dr Alexander Limmer and Dr Michael Edey of the Department of Surgery at Western Sydney Hospital, New South Wales, the study examined a year of emergency surgery for abdominal pain at a large metropolitan hospital in NSW. It explored reasons for transfer to alternative facilities and the kinds of delays that ultimately impact on the patient's health and on the Australian healthcare system.

The study, which focused on patients who were transferred from one hospital to another, and were experiencing abdominal pain or tenderness which resulted in surgery, analysed time to surgical intervention, post-operative length of stay and overall length of stay.

The principal findings of the study were that inter-hospital transfer for emergency surgery for abdominal pain was associated with a mean 14.2 hour increase in time to surgical intervention, 1.1 day longer post-operative length of stay and 1.6 days longer overall length of stay. When examined separately, mean time to surgery was significantly longer for transferred patients who underwent appendicectomy, cholecystectomy and cystoscopy. Mean post-operative length of stay was also increased for these patient groups however did not reach statistical significance. Despite the small number of cases, the observation that surgery for perforated peptic ulcer was performed within a comparable timeframe in both transferred patients and direct admissions highlights the capacity for the system to respond appropriately and efficiently expedite surgery for acutely life-threatening cases.

Although not directly analysed, the study considered whether the surgical delay associated with the transfer impacted on the patient's health and suggested that increases in pre and post-operative length of stay would impact on patient morbidity or rate of complications.

[Read the full article here](#)

*The ANZ Journal of Surgery, published by Wiley-Blackwell, is the pre-eminent surgical journal published in Australia, New Zealand and the South-East Asian region for the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons. The Journal is dedicated to the promotion of outstanding surgical practice, and research of contemporary and international interest.*



### About the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS)

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