Surgeons support ARLA finding as a step towards addressing Alcohol Related Harm

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The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) has come out in support of the Alcohol Regulatory and Licensing Authority’s reported rejection of the Wellington City Council’s proposal to allow bars and on-licence premises to stay open until 5am.

Surgeons, along with other health practitioners and members of the New Zealand Police, see first-hand the toll that alcohol takes on a Friday and Saturday night, consuming valuable resources and filling hospital emergency departments.

The Chair of the New Zealand National Board, Nigel Willis, welcomed the authority’s reported decision as a step towards addressing alcohol-related harm in New Zealand.

“There is a clear correlation between earlier closing times and reduced alcohol-related injuries in emergency departments. The council’s proposal to allow bars to remain open beyond the default national closing time of 4am was quite simply irresponsible,” Mr Willis said.

The College of Surgeons advocates strongly across three key areas where alcohol-related harm can most effectively be reduced, highlighted by the acronym HOT - for Hours, Outlets and Taxes.

This encompasses a restriction on trading hours, reducing outlet density, and applying a stepped volumetric tax.

Mr Willis said that local alcohol policies provided councils throughout New Zealand with a means of addressing the first two HOT issues.

“Unfortunately, most councils that have attempted to implement such policies have been challenged by the hospitality industry,” he said.

“This decision, along with the findings for the Tasman District Council in November last year, sends a clear signal to councils all over New Zealand that they need not cave to industry pressure.

“The paramount consideration of local councils should be the health and well-being of their communities; not the commercial interests of the alcohol industry,” the NZ National Board Chair said.

RACS urges the Wellington City Council, in light of the recent decision, to reconsider its local alcohol policy and support the community by reducing alcohol-related harm.

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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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