Life expectancy gap reflected in NT surgical audits

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A gap in life expectancy between Aboriginal Australians and non-Aboriginal Australians is reflected in statistics from the Northern Territory Audit of Surgical Mortality (NTASM), according to an article in the latest issue of the ANZ Journal of Surgery.

The article points to a large gap of 12 years for age at death between the two groups admitted as surgical patients in the Northern Territory, with Aboriginal persons suffering significantly more co-morbidities such as diabetes, renal and hepatic disease.

A study was conducted using retrospective data from the NTASM, administered by the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS), of outcome measures including causes of death, coexisting factors and deficiencies of care.

According to the article, results were comparable between rates of infection and all-cause trauma and there were no significant differences in rates of complications, unplanned returns to theatre, delays in surgery or whether the surgeon considered management could have been improved.

The study audited 190 deaths between June 2010 and June 2013, of which 72 were Aboriginal. It showed that Aboriginals died at a younger 53 years of age compared to 65 years for non-Aboriginal Australians mainly in general surgery.

A high rate of infection was reported, however this was expected as the article said the NT had the highest rates of necrotizing fasciitis in the world. The article also said that it could also be explained by the incidence of factors that predispose the condition including diabetes, malnutrition, alcohol abuse and smoking.

An editorial reflection of the study from Chair of the RACS Board of Surgical Education and Training, Mr Phil Truskett said that the evidence could not be ignored.

“Indigenous health has become a major focus for our College in Australia and New Zealand. It is not just about equity of access for surgery,” Mr Truskett said.

“As a professional body, we cannot ignore this alarming discrepancy in life expectancy in our Indigenous population - we need to play a constructive advocacy role,” he said.

Read the Editorial from Phil Truskett here
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)

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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