Surgeons acknowledge public interest in how well they do their job

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The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) is keen to engage in discussions on a framework for the public release of surgical data.

A recent ruling from the Office of the Ombudsman stated that District Health Boards should be required to make data, relating to the performance of individual surgeons, publically available.

The Medical Council of New Zealand has responded by releasing a discussion paper on the value that such data may provide.

RACS Fellow and Chair of the New Zealand National Board, Mr Nigel Willis, says that the College acknowledges the public’s wish for more information.

He says that surgical data however, must be presented in such a way that is both meaningful and useful.

“Raw data can’t tell you how well a person performs surgery - there are many factors that affect the final result from a surgical procedure besides the skill of the surgeon,” Mr Willis said

“There are many contributing factors such as the general health of the patient when they have an operation, the services available in that hospital and the knowledge and experience of the other health staff involved in that patient’s care.

“Without context, surgical data has the potential to be misleading and harmful. You cannot separate a surgeon from the environment within which she or he works.

“Any framework adopted must be tailored to suit New Zealand,” said Mr Willis.

RACS is currently seeking comment from its surgeons and will soon be responding to the Medical Council of New Zealand on its recently released discussion paper on the value of performance outcome data.

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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