Surgeons support stance on alcohol

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The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) says the Christchurch City Council’s recent decision to approve its Local Alcohol Policy is a big step forward.

Nigel Willis, Chair of the RACS New Zealand National Board, applauded the measures introduced in the policy saying that they represented a big stride forward in the reduction of alcohol-related harm both in Christchurch and New Zealand.

"Alcohol-related harm places a huge burden on New Zealand’s health system and on the lives of New Zealanders” Mr Willis said.

“Surgeons, hospital staff and the Police are all first-hand witnesses to the horrendous damage that the excessive consumption of alcohol causes on a day to day basis.”

The Local Alcohol Policy, approved yesterday by Christchurch’s City Councillors, requires on-licence and off-licence premises to close earlier, and limits the locations at which new premises may be opened.

The Policy also allows one-way door restrictions to be imposed at the discretion of the alcohol licensing authorities.

“There is mounting evidence which demonstrates that earlier closing times dramatically reduce the presentation of alcohol-related injuries in emergency departments. This frees up the already limited health resources for other patients in need.

“One-way door policies have also been shown to have a positive impact on the quality of a city’s nightlife.

Sydney adopted such an initiative early in 2014 and has enjoyed a substantial reduction in night-time assaults,” Mr Willis said.

The College of Surgeons strongly advocates for three key areas where alcohol-related harm can most effectively be reduced, summarised by the acronym HOT – for Hours, Outlets and Taxes. This encompasses a restriction trading hours, reducing outlet density, and applying a stepped volumetric tax on alcohol.

“Earlier closing times are understandably unpopular with the Hospitality Industry,” Mr Willis said.

“However, the health of the community should always be the paramount consideration for local councils nationwide.”

“By approving their Local Alcohol Policy, Christchurch has demonstrated considerable leadership in the struggle against alcohol-related harm.

We urge other local councils who have not yet done so to follow Christchurch’s example and implement their Local Alcohol Policies.”

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.

www.surgeons.org

Media inquiries:  Calum Barrett, RACS New Zealand+64 4 385 8247 or 0800 787 469