Gender Equity the big winner in RACS Council Election

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In the largest number of candidates on record for Fellowship Elected Councillor positions at the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS), six of the eight positions on offer have gone to female surgeons.

Half of the total number of Fellowship elected council positions (16) were up for grabs this year and five new female surgeons were voted into these roles with a sixth re-elected.

RACS Councillors serve as Company Directors on the RACS Board (Council). As part of their fiduciary responsibilities, they are responsible for setting the strategic direction of the College.

RACS President David Watters noted that many corporate and non-profit boards struggle with diversity.

“The latest percentage of women on ASX 200 boards is 20.6 per cent and 30 ASX 200 boards still have no female representation. These results take the RACS Council to 32 per cent.”

The Expert Advisory Group (EAG)’s report into discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment within the practice of surgery recommended amongst other things, cultural change and in particular to ensure diversity of representation on RACS committees.

Professor Watters said this election result was a very strong statement from the surgical profession that gender equity is an important cultural issue and that surgeons are taking heed of these recommendations.

Professors Watters also recognised the pro bono contribution of Fellows as this has been and continues to be the College’s most valuable asset and resource.

“We are extremely grateful for their commitment and we are also grateful to the voting Fellows who demonstrated their engagement with the governance of the College.”

“It is hoped that all those who have not been elected to Council on this occasion will be involved in other aspects of College representation and many will be willing to stand for election in the future.”

Professor Watters noted there had been a significant historical gender imbalance in the practice of surgery.

In 2013, while 52 per cent of medical students in Australia and New Zealand were female, women made up only 11 per cent of qualified surgeons.

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“Women account for 28 per cent of people entering surgical training,” Professor Watters said.

“The surgical profession is changing and while we have not set targets, already 30 per cent of Trainees are female and more than 40 per cent of Fellows under 35 are female.”

“RACS is actively working to identify and eliminate potential barriers for women entering and staying in the surgical profession,” he said.

Further information on the RACS election results can be found on the College website at www.surgeons.org

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