Audit shows number of deaths continues to decrease

13 October 2017

The 2017 Report of the Western Australian Audit of Surgical Mortality (WAASM) released today by the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) shows that while the total number of deaths has plateaued off, mortality is still falling after allowing for population growth.

Managed by RACS and funded by the WA Department of Health, the WAASM involves the clinical review of all deaths under the care of a surgeon, and is aimed at the ongoing improvement of surgical care. Clinical reviews are conducted by surgeons who practice in the same specialty but from a different hospital.

The 2017 Report presents the outcome of clinical reviews conducted into 2897 deaths over five years.

According to Audit Chairman Mr James Aitken, the number of deaths per 100,000 reported to the WAASM has decreased from between 30 to 35 in the first five years (2002 to 2006), to 24 in 2011 and a record low of 22.1 in 2016.

“This suggests the WAASM is achieving its aim of reducing the proportion of deaths associated with clinical management issues in WA,” Mr Aitken said.

“It is pleasing that this on-going trend has continued into 2017. Cases with clinical management issues were significantly lower this year than they have been in previous years.”

The WAASM was the first audit of its kind in Australia when it initially piloted in 2001 under the management of the University of Western Australia. In 2005 management of the WAASM transferred to RACS.

Audits now exist in every Australian state and territory. The audit continues to evolve over time and from January 2017 the WAASM mandated an online platform for submitting surgical case forms and first-line assessments. On-line reporting is now 99.2 per cent, compared to 30 per cent when first launched in November 2013.

“The on-going development of the audit process since 2001 remains significant. We are now able to access high quality information and data which was non-existent before this process begun.”

“This provides us with an honest appraisal of where we are at as a profession and guides us in any education and training activities that may be required.”

Media inquiries:  
Mark Morgan  
Policy and Communications Officer  
Royal Australasian College of Surgeons  
(08) 8219 0922
“It also produces valuable information that can be utilised by governments in the development of public health policy.”

The 2017 WAASM Report is available on the RACS website