



Colleges welcome postponement of elective surgery

Specialist medical colleges across Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia support the temporary postponement of all non-urgent elective surgery in areas of high prevalence of COVID-19 infection across the two countries.

This communique is issued by the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS), the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA), the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG), the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists (RANZCO), the Royal Australasian College of Medical Administrators (RACMA), the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine (ACEM) and the College of Intensive Care Medicine Of Australia and New Zealand (CICM).

The colleges, which represent seven specialties covering surgeons, anaesthetists, obstetricians and gynaecologists, ophthalmologists, emergency physicians, intensive care doctors and medical administrators, welcome the decision by most health bodies in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand to temporarily cease elective surgery in affected areas.

In some areas in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, the hospital systems face an unprecedented threat with the surge in COVID-19 infections. Increased acute hospital admissions place pressure on intensive care beds, hospital workforce, and other resources, and create hospital access blocks, as beds fill. Rural and regional centres that experience difficulty getting locums, and fly-in fly-out staff, because of border closures, may also need to restrict elective surgery.

“We welcome a consistent approach in both Australia, and Aotearoa New Zealand, which prioritises the health, safety and wellbeing of all patients, medical, nursing, midwifery and allied health staff. In areas of high prevalence of COVID-19 infection, all non-urgent elective surgery in public hospitals should be postponed. Private hospitals should be mobilised to accept urgent surgery and deploy staff to areas of community need. Regions not in lockdown may need to send staff to affected regions to help.”

All surgical groups will consult and identify critical procedures that are not able to be postponed. Each college will continue to engage with local hospitals, the Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand governments, health departments and ministry, and health administrators, to support a coordinated response to this public health crisis. “We reiterate our commitment to collaborate to provide the best possible care for our community.”

Postponement of surgical cases will need to be addressed in the future. The colleges will continue to discuss recommencement of normal surgical lists, while continuing to provide urgent care, as well as management of wait-lists, and sustainable mechanisms to address backlogs.

“Patients and their families should be reassured that all urgent surgical care will continue and that they should present to their doctor, or urgent care facility or emergency department, with any acute symptoms. Do not delay seeking medical care.”

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