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Sickest patients to benefit from new campaign for faster recovery

Helping Australia's sickest patients to avoid serious complications after their operation and improve their recovery is the focus of a new information campaign about to be rolled out by specialist doctors.

The Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA) campaign "***Caring for our sickest patients before, during and after surgery***" is aimed at highlighting the importance of co-ordinated and personalised care of patients.

Specialist anaesthetist and ANZCA Vice-President Professor David Story says some patients already have a wide range of healthcare professionals working together to improve their hospital experience.

"When you are referred for an operation many healthcare professionals from different medical specialties will work together to make your operation and recovery go as smoothly as possible," Professor Story explains.

"We're highlighting the importance of an integrated, planned, and personalised approach to patient care – also known as perioperative medicine – before, during and after any surgical procedure involving anaesthesia.

"Patients with a range of medical conditions are at higher risk of poor outcomes so this approach ensures that complications after operations are reduced and the amount of time patients spend in hospital. It will also help to reduce early readmissions to hospital after an operation for some patients.

"There are more than three million procedures a year in Australia. Australia is one of the safest places to have a surgical procedure involving anaesthesia, and our anaesthetists are among the most highly trained specialist doctors in the world.

"Australia has some of the best post-surgical survival rates in the world. However, we do have a hidden pandemic of complications and deaths after surgery."

Professor Story says perioperative care has an important role to play in Australia's health system and anaesthetists are playing a lead role in its development.

"By leading high quality care in anaesthesia, perioperative and pain medicine, we are optimising health and reducing the burden of pain for all in the community," he explains.

“The greatest benefits will be to vulnerable patients such as the very old, the very young and those with underlying health conditions who will be more satisfied and endure less pain as part of their surgical treatment. We now have many patients who already have major complications or problems prior to their operation. So that means we must optimise and personalise their care before, during and after their procedure.”

The campaign coincides with the 2023 launch of the ANZCA Diploma of Perioperative Medicine. The new qualification, which has enrolled its first participants at nine hospitals in Australia and New Zealand, will enable specialist doctors such as anaesthetists, surgeons, physicians, intensivists, and GPs to enhance their skills and knowledge in perioperative medicine.

Hospitals in Australia and New Zealand will also be established as trial sites for the new perioperative medicine model.

“Anaesthetists are part of the perioperative care team who can help you understand what to expect before, during and after your operation. The team will help follow your care from the time you discuss the possibility of an operation with your GP through to the best possible outcome for you.”

“Better, co-ordinated care of surgical patients before, during and after their surgery – what we call the perioperative period – leads to improved outcomes for patients and cost savings for the health system.

ANZCA has created a short animated video for patients that anaesthetists and hospitals can use as part of a suite of online resources which also includes posters and fact sheets at anzca.edu.au.

Dozens of hospitals in Australia and New Zealand are supporting the National Anaesthesia Day campaign on Monday 16 October – the anniversary of the day in 1846 that ether anaesthesia was first demonstrated publicly. National Anaesthesia Day is celebrated each year across Australia and New Zealand.

ANZCA, as one of Australia and New Zealand’s largest specialist medical colleges with 8200 specialist anaesthetists (fellows) and 580 specialist pain medicine physicians, is responsible for the training, examination and specialist accreditation of anaesthetists and pain medicine specialists and for the standards of clinical practice in Australia and New Zealand.

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