



The Royal Australasian
College of Physicians

New Zealand

New Zealand Society of
Gastroenterology Inc

Media Release

RACP and NZSG – need for a National bowel cancer screening program

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The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) and the New Zealand Society of Gastroenterology (NZSG) welcome the Government's continued interest in combating bowel cancer in the 2015 Budget but says there is still no commitment to a national screening program.

RACP New Zealand President, Associate Professor Mark Lane, and NZSG President Dr Russell Walmsley welcomed the extra funding for the Bowel Cancer Screening Pilot at Waitemata District Health Board (DHB) but say a long term strategy to fight bowel cancer is still needed.

While the Budget contained a \$12.4 million funding boost for the pilot program operating at DHB, it falls short of implementing a national bowel screening program," A/Prof Lane said.

Each year 3000 New Zealanders are diagnosed with bowel cancer, with 1200 dying from the disease according to the Ministry of Health.

"Bowel cancer causes the second-highest number of cancer deaths in New Zealand annually," A/Prof Lane said.

"If detected early via colonoscopy, many cases of bowel cancer can be treated successfully."

The World Health Organisation's International Agency for Research on Cancer cites Australia and New Zealand as having the highest incidence of bowel cancer in the world.

Australia announced funding for a pilot in 2006, and in 2014 the federal budget increased funding to accelerate the implementation of a national bowel cancer screening program to all Australians aged 50 to 74 by 2020.

"A national bowel cancer screening program in New Zealand will inevitably result in increased demand for colonoscopy (the diagnostic procedure to determine presence of bowel cancer)," Dr Walmsley said.

"This will require additional workforce capacity, to not only perform the colonoscopies but interpret and act on the results."

The RACP educates and trains gastroenterologists and there are 21 trainees progressing through the College's 36 month Advanced Training in Gastroenterology program in New Zealand.

"The College and the NZSG see an increase of gastroenterology trainee positions nationwide as a critical component of any sustainable national screening program," A/Prof Lane said.

"This is particularly important as the specialist workforce ages. Currently the average age of a New Zealand consultant is 55."

The RACP and the NZSG look forward to working with the Ministry of Health to develop a robust screening program delivered by a capable and well-resourced workforce.

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About the New Zealand Society of Gastroenterology (NZSG): The NZSG promotes the advancement of knowledge in gastroenterology in New Zealand, the improved standards in the practice of gastroenterology and research into the field of gastroenterology and allied subjects. Members of the NZSG are Gastroenterologists, physicians with an interest in gastroenterology, surgeons, pathologists, medical scientists and trainees in gastroenterology. www.nzsg.org.nz.

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About The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP): The RACP trains, educates and advocates on behalf of more than 14,950 physicians – often referred to as medical specialists – and 6,530 Trainee members across Australia and New Zealand. The College represents more than 34 medical specialties including paediatrics & child health, cardiology, respiratory medicine, neurology, oncology and public health medicine, occupational & environmental medicine, palliative medicine, sexual health medicine, rehabilitation medicine and addiction medicine. Beyond the drive for medical excellence, the RACP is committed to developing health and social policies which bring vital improvements to the wellbeing of patients. www.racp.edu.au