

Support for surgeons following an adverse event

Over the past few years the Victorian Surgical Consultative Council (VSCC) has looked at a number of serious adverse events, such as 'wrong site surgery', where the surgeon involved has had a major psychological reaction to the situation but has not sought any help and has not been *directly* offered any help.

We should indeed consider the effect that the adverse event has on patients and their family but we should also think about the surgeon involved and what can be done to support him/her in what is always a very disturbing situation.

If only to increase awareness of the problem, the VSCC wrote to the Chief Executive Officers of all Victorian health services asking if they had in place any system to deal with the issue. We have had a number of replies and clearly it has raised 'awareness' of the issue. One of the big problems of course is that the surgeons involved rarely, if ever, voluntarily seek help or counselling.

The VSCC has been in discussion with the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons' (RACS) Professional Development and Standards Board, under the Chairmanship of Dr Ian Dickinson, and they have undertaken to look at the issue to see if mechanisms can be put in place. The VSCC has considered the possibility of setting up a properly structured peer support system, which could respond as soon as the event occurs. The help and support is not so much required days after the event but particularly in the first 24 hours.

If you have any suggestions to make we would very much welcome an email or letter from you or you may like to contact Dr Ian Dickinson directly through the RACS.

VSCC Approved: May 2007