



MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday 11 October, 2006

New hip/knee prostheses 'not better'; Revision surgery 'can be halved'

The establishment of the National Joint Replacement Registry* – which has been fully operational only since 2002 – has already reduced by 1200 annually the number of joint replacement revision operations being undertaken in Australia at a saving of between \$16 million and \$30 million per annum.

A major research and discussion paper released in Canberra today says notwithstanding the major benefits already being generated, the revision rate can be further reduced, probably halved.

The paper, commissioned by the Australian Centre for Health Research (ACHR) as part of its brief to promote discussion on ways of achieving a more efficient public and private health system, was produced jointly by Professor Stephen Graves, Director of the National Joint Replacement Registry and Dr Vanessa Wells, Clinical Research Coordinator at the Repatriation General Hospital in Adelaide.

Ten years ago there were about 30,000 joint replacements in Australia; today that figure is 65,000 at an estimated cost of well over \$1 billion. More than 60% of these procedures are done in the private sector. Prostheses represent 35% of total costs (and it's rising, particularly in the private sector) while non prostheses expenditure has declined.

In presenting the paper, Professor Graves said: "currently, the risk of revision surgery in Australia is better than or comparable to most other countries - between 20 and 25% for both hip and knee. But this compares with 10% in Sweden owing to the long-standing impact of that country's Hip and Knee Registries.

"Some of the factors that contribute to Australia's higher failure rate include the use of large numbers of different types of prostheses and a low use of cement fixation.

"The Registry is now also showing us that newer, generally more expensive prostheses, do not always deliver a better outcome than earlier, cheaper models."

Professor Graves called for more rigour in the process that allows therapeutic products to enter the Australian health system.

* The National Joint Replacement Registry, entirely funded by the federal government, monitors the outcome of all joint replacement procedures in Australia. The Registry is an initiative of the Australian Orthopaedic Association and was established in 1999. It is a collaborative effort between orthopaedic surgeons, government, all hospitals undertaking such surgery and the orthopaedic industry.

“The pre-market assessment aimed at ensuring the safety, quality and performance of a prosthesis, currently does **not** involve an evaluation of its comparative safety or effectiveness. It should,” said Professor Graves.

“Further, although the National Joint Registry **always** notifies companies when their prostheses have a higher-than-expected rate of revision compared with others in the same category, no sponsor or manufacturer has subsequently notified the Therapeutic Goods Administration of these higher rates, even although under current legislation, they have an obligation to do so.”

The discussion paper estimates that the surgical revision rate in Australia can be halved.

Professor Graves said the National Joint Replacement Registry is now presenting clear evidence on which surgeons can act – the platform is in place to reduce significantly the risk of having to undergo surgical revision of a joint replacement.

“The benefits to both the individual affected and the health system are obvious.

“By any judgement, the federal government’s investment in the Registry is paying very large dividends, not just economically but in reduced pain and suffering for patients.”

“There is only one perfect outcome – that there is no need for revision. Revision surgery to address pain, or an infection or because a prosthesis is loose in the bone is a failure.”

Professor Graves also called for an intensive investigation to determine why the rate of increase in the rate of knee replacements in Australia is so high.

“It is not just the result of ageing – there is clearly a problem which, at present, we do not understand,” added Professor Graves.

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Further information:

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- ◇ The rate of hip replacement in Australia is 30% below other developed countries, probably indicated an ‘unmet need’ in the Australian community.
- ◇ The increases in joint replacements took place in both the public and private sectors but the increase in the private sector has been far greater. (Rate of increase privately was 90.8% v public 27.9% over 8 years)
- ◇ In 1997-98, 51.5% of joint replacement procedures occurred privately – in 2004-05, the figure was 61.3%
- ◇ If the current rate of increase in joint replacement continues, the number is likely to double by 2016. Hip replacement has risen from 114 per 100,000 head of population in 1997-98 to 148 in 2004-05. In the same period, figures for knee replacements rose from 207 to 305 per 100,000 head of population – double the rate of hip replacement.