

Editorial

'The Future Today'

The First International Conference and Exhibition on Same-Day Surgery, held in Perth on 27–30 October 1993, highlighted the need for a forum on practical issues relating to day surgery. In all 350 delegates attended the conference, which set out to bring together a wide range of professionals working in day surgery as well as health managers, health planners and other related professionals from all over Australia, New Zealand, South-East Asia and further afield, in the first truly practical day surgery meeting concentrating on outcomes supported by data drawn from the USA, UK and Australia. The main objective of the conference was to focus on recent rapid developments in new technology and techniques which have already led to more major surgery being conducted on a same-day basis.

The conference acknowledged that more was needed to encourage the growth of day surgery in Australia, where it currently accounts for about 30% of all surgical procedures, to bring it more in line with countries such as the USA, where approximately 50% of all surgery is conducted on a same-day basis. This will entail altering the attitudes of health-industry workers (including doctors), educating patients to accept change, and lobbying federal and state governments to provide the right incentives. The need for such incentives was highlighted by Paul Gross, a health economist from New South Wales, who said that if all procedures currently being done on an inpatient basis were switched to day surgery facilities, there would be an instant 30% decrease in bed utilization, and the cost of private health insurance would be slashed by \$600 a year.

The conference was hosted by the Perth Surgicentre and endorsed by the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, the Australian Association of Day Surgery Centres and the National Day Surgery Committee. Support was also received from the Royal Australian College of Ophthalmologists, the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists, the Royal Australian College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Commonwealth Department of Health, Housing and Community Services and the West Australian Department of Commerce and Trade.

Principal and major sponsors included Smith and Nephew Richards Pty Ltd, Medibank Private (national health fund), and the Health Department and Hospital Benefit Fund of Western Australia.

The conference opened with plenary sessions on international and Australian day surgery experiences, and an examination of cost considerations. The first day concluded with a look at patient management (preparation, complications, recovery, follow-up and the need to give patients more control), and issues concerning anaesthesia.

On day two there were concurrent sessions examining current practice, the application and results of new technology and techniques, and international developments in gynaecology/urology, general surgery, orthopaedics, ophthalmology and paediatric surgery, as well as issues relating to the operation of a day surgery unit, including health insurance perspectives, marketing initiatives, the design of day units, finance, technology assessment and quality control. These were broken by a plenary session on the impact of new technology on such areas as training, standards and medico-legal concerns.

On the final day, all the invited international speakers presented papers on future developments in their respective subspecialties in the same plenary session. Medical conferences are becoming by necessity so specialized that it was refreshing and fascinating for the audience to hear of future perspectives from such a variety of specialists on the same programme. This was particularly so for the surgeons listening to presentations from specialities other than their own, and clearly demonstrated to all present that the problems of standards, training and accreditation for minimal access procedures are common to different specialities worldwide. Many specialists are now rethinking the way they practise, as a direct result of the practical benefits of day surgery (economic and otherwise).

In response to the rapid developments in day surgery and the interest generated by the conference, the Australian Association of Day Surgery Centres – at its annual general meeting, held to coincide with the Perth conference – resolved to change its structure and

membership, as well as to rename the association, to become a representative organization for day surgery embracing free-standing and integrated hospital day units, public and private sectors, and metropolitan and country facilities. This will also include linking up with day surgery special-interest groups and bodies not only in Australia, but in other countries in South-East Asia.

Accelerated growth in day surgery in Australia is predicted, which will create even greater interest for the next international conference planned to take place in Melbourne in 1995.

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