

NURSE ENDOSCOPY FOR PROVISION OF COLONOSCOPY SERVICES IN AUSTRALIA

POSITION STATEMENT OF THE GASTROENTEROLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA APRIL 2021

Colonoscopy is an important medical procedure that requires highly specialised clinical skills, cognitive and technical mastery and clinicopathological correlation. GESA is committed to the delivery of high-quality endoscopic services to ensure optimal patient care and world class outcomes. The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (ACSQHC) Colonoscopy Clinical Care Standard (2020) states that colonoscopy should be performed by a credentialed clinician working within their scope of clinical practice, who meet the requirements of an accepted certification and recertification process. Recertification of ongoing competency is mandatory for all practitioners working in health service organisations being assessed to national standards.

The GESA Colonoscopy Recertification Program incorporates a formal recertification process based on review of on-line logbooks. GESA also provides training and education opportunities for practicing colonoscopists. Review of quality outcome data of colonoscopists recertified in the program demonstrate that Australian colonoscopists have among the highest adenoma and sessile serrated lesion detection rates in the world.

The delivery of colonoscopy services to all Australians requires access to skilled proceduralists working in a health care setting supported by anaesthetic/sedation and recovery facilities, adequate equipment and critically, skilled nursing staff.

In Australia there is no shortage of medically trained colonoscopists. There are sufficient specialist gastroenterologists and surgeons, and colonoscopists-in-training, to meet current and future demand in metropolitan and regional centres. The training of new colonoscopists requires access to colonoscopy lists under the supervision of experienced medical and surgical colonoscopists. The provision of endoscopic services in Australia is hindered by inadequate infrastructure and under-funding, not a lack of endoscopists.

A highly trained nursing workforce is essential to the provision of high-quality endoscopic services, as well as to support the care of patients with advanced liver disease, liver cancer and viral hepatitis, inflammatory bowel disease and intestinal failure. A dedicated nursing workforce is also essential to clinical trials management and to support the administrative requirements of endoscopy and clinic waiting lists and surveillance programmes. There are unmet needs within the requirements for a skilled gastroenterology and hepatology nursing workforce and specialised nurses are indispensable in these roles.

Training and expansion of a nurse endoscopy workforce will place further pressures on the current requirements for dedicated gastroenterology and hepatology nursing and on health systems which require expansion of infrastructure and adequate resourcing. When supported, nurse endoscopy should be provided in parallel with, and under the supervision of, medical or surgical endoscopy services and should not be an independent service. Therefore, nurse-colonoscopist services will not be suitable to resolve the inadequate provision of services in Australian regional centres.

GESA's position is that the requirement for providing high quality colonoscopy services, focussed on best practice, training, patient care and safety is best served by a medical procedural model supported by a skilled endoscopy nursing workforce. The system must be resourced adequately in terms of access to procedural facilities, equipment, administrative support, anaesthetic services and pathology services.

Pursuing non-physician endoscopic services for workforce and economic reasons is misguided. The literature confirms endoscopic services provided by nurses may have outcomes and adverse events equivalent to those provided by medical proceduralists, however they are no more cost-effective than the traditional medical model. On the contrary, they may lead to the requirement for additional follow-up care from medical specialists including an increased rate of second procedures which impact finite resources and patient care delivery.

GESA remains committed to the provision of high qualified colonoscopy services for appropriate indications to all Australians, utilising certified and recertified medical proceduralists.

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