

The History of BreastSurgANZ



Prior to the formation of BreastSurgANZ, a general surgery fellowship awarded by the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) was sufficient for a surgeon to perform breast cancer surgery.

For many years, the Breast Section of RACS acted as the “voice” for breast surgical practice and was comprised of surgeons representing each of the Australian states and territories and a New Zealand representative, with two principal aims: to develop an educational program for the RACS Annual Scientific Congress, and to address standards of care in breast disease.

The Breast Quality Audit

In 1995, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs recommended that the RACS establish a compulsory form of accreditation and audit of general surgeons performing breast cancer surgery.

In 1998, a one-year pilot study was initiated using a trial dataset initiated in South Australia and Tasmania to:

1. create a standardised and centralised breast cancer database of surgical activity in Australia and New Zealand,
2. collate data for research and statistical purposes, and
3. allow surgeons to compare their own surgical practices with those of their peers.

Qualified privilege was awarded by the Federal government, acknowledging the BQA as a quality assurance activity in connection with the provision of health services, to protect information from disclosure and to protect surgeons involved from civil liability.

Changes were made to the dataset for both invasive breast cancer and Ductal Carcinoma in Situ (DCIS) to be user-friendly. This included a secure online data entry system, which significantly improved the quality and completeness of data entry by participating breast surgeons. The BQA soon became the largest repository of breast cancer data in the southern hemisphere, capturing approximately 65% of all breast cancers treated in Australia and New Zealand.

The many other benefits of the BQA include:

1. Assessing Management Trends in Breast Cancer
2. Promoting the Uptake of Evidence-Based Medicine
3. Research
4. Ensuring Quality of Surgical Practice and Benchmarking

In 2005, the BQA moved a step further in ensuring the quality of surgical breast practice. Based on the best available levels of evidence in breast cancer management at the time, several clearly defined Key Performance Indicators were introduced to implement benchmarks that surgeons should comply with. As such, the BQA could implement improvements in surgeons' performance.

The Formation of the Breast Surgeons Society of Australia and New Zealand (BreastSurgANZ)

Due to the significant advances made by breast surgeons in relation to improvements in clinical practice, sub-specialisation and the Breast Quality Audit, the RACS Breast Section Executive approached the RACS Council with a request that membership to the Breast Section be stratified according to surgeons who contribute to the Breast Cancer Audit (Full, Associate and Honorary membership).

The application was rejected as differential membership was not permitted under the Constitution of the College and RACS recommended that if the Breast Section wished to distinguish specialist breast surgeons from other members of the College that some consideration be given to the formation of an independent society.

In February 2008, surgeons representing the RACS Breast Section met in Melbourne to propose the formation of a specialist breast surgeons' society and to formulate a Constitution. The business name "Breast Surgeons of Australia and New Zealand" (BreastSurgANZ) was confirmed. BreastSurgANZ was recognised as an income tax exempt (ITE) organisation by the Australian Taxation Office under the "health promotion charity" category and DGR status was also obtained.

BreastSurgANZ was announced at the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons' Annual Scientific Congress in Perth in May 2010, celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2020. BreastSurgANZ has forged close working relationships with other national breast cancer stakeholders such as Cancer Australia, COSA, ANZ Breast Cancer Trials Group, Australasian Society of Breast Diseases and Breast Cancer Network Australia. In May 2011, BreastSurgANZ signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Association of Breast Surgery (United Kingdom) with the aims of forging relationships in areas of clinical research, technical advancement, and training.

Disbanding of the RACS Breast Section

An online poll of RACS Breast Surgery Section members was conducted from 11 – 25 August 2014 and confirmed that 82% of RACS Breast Section members agreed with the proposition that the Breast Surgery Section of RACS be disbanded, a decision ratified by the RACS Professional Development and Standards Board Executive.

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