

RS007
EVALUATION OF GENERAL SURGICAL OUTREACH ON THURSDAY ISLAND

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Purpose: Surgical outreach is generally accepted as an effective method to overcome many of the barriers to effective healthcare in rural areas. The Cairns Hospital conducts outreach to a number of communities in North Queensland, the most significant of which being Thursday Island (TI). There is however a paucity of data describing the effectiveness of these programs.

Methodology: A retrospective review of the General Surgical Outreach program spanning 03/2015 to 08/2016 was performed to identify factors associated with successful management in the outreach setting using Chi-square analysis. Markers for successful management included 1) whether the initial patient consultation was made within the nationally adopted maximum time frame from referral, and 2) whether the patient was managed solely in the outreach setting.

Results: 89 cases were evaluated, 72% of which were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Peoples. The most common presenting complaints were cholelithiasis (26%) followed by abdominal hernias (17%). 54% of patients had completed their consultation within maximum time frame. 63% were managed entirely on TI, 37% of which were surgically managed in the local operating theatre. No demographical or clinical factors were associated with successful management.

Conclusion: Surgical outreach on TI allows a significant proportion of patients to be managed locally, thereby breaking a barrier to accessing health care. This research has identified that it is common however for patients to be seen beyond the recommended time frame and for patients to have to travel regardless. Further research is needed to identify the patients that are most successfully managed in this setting in order to improve the effectiveness of the program.