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Media Release

Vindication for mesh injured women: but suspend mesh until after audit results

Australia's state and territory based health consumer organisations have welcomed the recognition of the extent and impact of harm to women, and the recommendations contained in the report from the Senate Inquiry into transvaginal mesh implants released yesterday. But they say they hoped the report had gone further.

"We are very pleased that the Senate's recommendations reflecting our calls to strengthen provisions for informed consent, only using mesh as a last resort, requiring mandatory reporting of complications, establishing a register (which should be retrospective and for all transvaginal mesh devices) and having the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care do an audit of transvaginal mesh procedures in Australia. The Commission must be resourced to do this in a timely manner and the audit should also include procedures done by private specialists" said state and territory consumer peaks spokesperson Melissa Fox, CEO of Health Consumers Queensland.

"However until the community sees this accurate, retrospective data we won't know just how many women have been harmed by all types of mesh including POP, tapes and slings. We are disappointed that a more cautious approach wasn't taken, to recommend the suspension in use of all mesh until the data is in to establish their safety and efficacy. These devices will continue to be implanted in women in hospitals across Australia tomorrow, and not one more woman should be unwittingly subjected to this high-stakes surgical intervention until we can be assured of their safety", said Ms Fox.

The peaks question why it's taken ten years since the TGA first reviewed the safety of the meshes, and the need for women to lobby for a Senate inquiry, to shine a light on this issue. As such we also call for federal, state and territory Governments to:

- Hold a separate inquiry into the responsibilities, operations and funding of the TGA with special emphasis on its failure to provide timely warnings;
- Investigate why normal patient experience measures including complaints processes within health services and regulatory authorities at both Federal and State levels failed to identify a pattern of mesh failure.

"Over ninety percent of submissions received by the committee were from women who bravely shared their distressing experiences of being harmed and subsequently struggling to receive the care they needed. The fight for recognition is now over for thousands of Australian women who have endured the wide ranging impacts of their debilitating mesh injuries. Our organisations will continue to stand by their side as they seek disability support and access to appropriate services.

"We now expect deep reflection and collaborative leadership from Federal and State health authorities, and surgeons and their relevant colleges and societies. They must demonstrate a willingness to work in an open and transparent way with mesh-affected women to co-design effective, lifetime pathways for care. There needs to be cooperation between jurisdictions to ensure women receive care through a nationally consistent model, delivered by multidisciplinary specialised teams and including links into primary care. It can't be a postcode lottery which determines whether mesh-injured women will receive appropriate, timely, skilled and compassionate care.

"Women also need assurance as to the skill of surgeons within those teams, so service development must include a review of training and skills for safe full removal of complete mesh products, and consideration of credentialing overseas mesh removal specialists to deliver training as required" said Ms Fox.

END

Full list of our recommendations, p.15-16:

Joint Senate submission by Health Consumers Councils across Australia (31 May 2017)

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