One in five surgeons set to retire early due to physical toll

Survey exposes the physical impact on surgeons of conducting minimal access/keyhole procedures that threaten to shorten surgical careers and put further pressure on health systems.

- Nearly 20% of surgeons in the UK and the U.S, and 15% of surgeons surveyed in Germany think they may need to retire early due to physical impact of conducting laparoscopic surgery.
- Approximately three in four UK surgeons (76%) have experienced back pain while performing laparoscopic surgery.
- 78% of surgeons in the United States and 61% of surgeons in Germany have experienced muscular or back pain while performing laparoscopic surgery.
- 16% of surgeons in the UK, 13% of surgeons in the U.S, and 10% of surgeons in Germany, have had to consult with a healthcare professional due to musculoskeletal injuries.
- 37% of UK surgeons believe they reach the peak of their operating ability after 50.

CAMBRIDGE, UK. 15 September 2019. Up to a fifth of surgeons in the UK (19%), U.S (20%) and Germany (15%) predict they are likely to retire early because of the physical strain of conducting minimal access/keyhole surgical procedures, according to a survey of over 450 surgeons across Europe and the U.S. The survey, commissioned by CMR Surgical, recruited general, gynaecological and colorectal surgeons who regularly perform laparoscopic surgery, which is proven to reduce pain, scarring and patient recovery time.

Despite having proven benefits, minimal access techniques are not used in almost half of all cases worldwide with up to 6 million patients globally not receiving the benefits of this type of surgery. The technique can be difficult to conduct and physically gruelling for a surgeon to do, where the surgeon stands in physically difficult positions to conduct procedures including hysterectomy, hernia-repair and colectomy. The survey has revealed that 30% of surgeons experienced discomfort during surgery due to the awkward positions undertaken, with three in four surgeons having experienced back pain when performing laparoscopic surgery. In addition, up to 16% of surgeons have had to consult with a healthcare professional as a result of musculoskeletal injuries from conducting minimal access/keyhole procedures.

The physical strain of conducting minimal access procedures is further adding to an existing workforce crisis. Many health systems, including in the UK and the U.S, are facing chronic workforce shortages so prolonging the working life of a surgeon is pivotal to the continued delivery of sustainable healthcare. A recent study found that when it comes to the National Health Service, the biggest employer in Europe, over half (53%) of senior doctors (consultants) said that there was frequently gaps in hospital medical cover that raises significant patient safety issues. The picture is similar in the U.S, with a study showing that by 2050 there will be a deficit of over 7,000 general surgeons.
There is a common misconception about what the peak working age is for a surgeon. The survey has revealed that 90% of surgeons surveyed believe surgeons reach the peak of their operating ability by the age of 54. However, studies have shown that the peak age for a surgeon is actually 55-60 years old.\textsuperscript{xiv}

According to the survey, one in five surgeons believe they will have to retire early, the equivalent to over 3,000 surgeons in the UK losing key experienced surgeons from health systems that are already stretched.

Commenting on the survey’s findings Adrian Park, MD, Professor of Surgery at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine said: “Surgeons of all stripes are reporting musculoskeletal pain and injuries as a result of going to work every day. It is hard to imagine that those responsible for any other workplace, let alone one where the stakes are so high, such as in surgery, would tolerate rates of “worker injury” such as are now being reported by surgeons. Surgeons need to be supported to conduct minimal access procedures sustainably in order to protect the future of the surgical workforce, for the benefit of surgeons, hospitals and most importantly, patients.”

“It is unacceptable that to conduct laparoscopic surgery and offer its benefits to patients and healthcare providers, we neglect the impact this is having on the surgical workforce. Surgical robotics can play a role in extending surgical careers, by allowing surgeons to perform laparoscopic surgery with a choice of ergonomic solutions more typically found in offices across the world. With a workforce crisis facing health systems around the world, now is the time to act in order to protect our surgical workforce of the future.” commented Mark Slack, Chief Medical Officer at CMR Surgical.

The survey also revealed:

- The most common areas of discomfort are the back, neck and shoulders for surgeons.\textsuperscript{xv}
- Surgeons who perform colorectal surgery are significantly more likely to consider early retirement than those who perform gynaecological surgery.\textsuperscript{xvi}
- Over a quarter of surgeons surveyed frequently experience muscular or back pain as a result of surgery.\textsuperscript{xvii}
- Surgeons who are under 5 ft 3” or over 6 ft 1” are most likely to experience muscular or back pain during, or as a result of, surgery.\textsuperscript{xviii}

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About the “Surgeons and Back Pain” Survey

CMR Surgical commissioned research agency Bryter to conduct an online survey of 462 laparoscopic gynaecological surgeons, colorectal surgeons and general surgeons who perform hernia repair through minimal access surgery across the UK (152 surgeons), Germany (152) and the United States (158). The survey was conducted between 11 March and 2 April 2019 and screening criteria was used to ensure that all respondents regularly perform laparoscopic procedures. Surgeons surveyed specialised in gynaecology, colorectal, or general surgery.

The Versius® Surgical Robotic System

Versius® resets expectations of robotic surgery by providing a versatile system that is portable, transportable and affordable. This is made possible because of its elegant form factor, modular design and individually cart-mounted arms. Versius® is able to move between operating rooms and even hospitals/clinics and gives the surgical team excellent access to the patient at all times. With 3D HD vision, easy-to adopt instrument control and a choice of ergonomic working positions, the new open surgeon console has the potential to reduce stress and fatigue and extend the careers of surgeons.

About CMR Surgical Limited

CMR Surgical is a British private limited company developing the next-generation robotic system, Versius®, for minimal access surgery. The company received the European CE Mark in March 2019 for the Versius® Surgical Robotic System.

The vision behind CMR Surgical is to make minimal access surgery universally accessible and affordable, transforming the existing market for surgical robotics while also addressing the six million people who still undergo open surgery each year.

Global annual revenues for robot-assisted minimal access surgery are presently approximately $4 billion and are anticipated to reach $20 billion by 2025.

CMR Surgical, formed in 2014, has its headquarters in Cambridge, United Kingdom and is backed by an international shareholder base of specialist and generalist investors.

The Company achieved the registration of its Quality Management System to ISO 13485:2016 by Underwriters Laboratories LLC® (UL), and the status as a UL Registered Firm, in September 2015.

For further information, please visit www.cmrsurgical.com
References