

DVA's 'no' to cost of most robotically assisted surgery

The Department of Veterans' Affairs does not accept financial responsibility for robotically assisted surgery, whether requested by a doctor or a hospital, except in rare cases in which significant clinical evidence has been provided to support its use as the only viable treatment option, according to the *Latest News* from DVA.

The department says, "We have received a number of requests for robotic assisted laparoscopic prostatectomy. In 2006, the Medical Services Advisory Committee (MSAC — the body that advises the Government about items on the Medicare Benefits Schedule) evaluated the use of robotic assisted surgery compared [with] open radical prostatectomy in terms of safety, effectiveness and cost-effectiveness.

"The MSAC review concluded that there was uncertainty about the comparative cost-effectiveness of robotic laparoscopic surgery as a shorter period of hospitalisation does not offset the additional costs involved.

"MSAC also noted that there was insufficient evidence on long-term outcomes compared [with] an open radical prostatectomy — that is, the remission rates associated with incomplete removal of the cancerous tissue. Open radical prostatectomy is still considered the 'gold standard' for this type of procedure.

"Consequently, DVA does not accept financial responsibility for robotic assisted surgery, whether requested by a doctor or hospital — except in rare cases [in which] significant clinical evidence has been provided to support its use as the only viable treatment option. Any request for exceptional circumstances to support the funding of robotic surgery is considered on a case-by-case basis and should be submitted to DVA for approval [before] the surgery takes place.

"This request must be made by the treating doctor. DVA will not fund robotic laparoscopic prostatectomy on the basis of veteran's or surgeon's personal preference for this procedure. If the robotic assisted surgery is provided without DVA approval — either not obtaining it or proceeding having been rejected by DVA — then DVA will only fund the surgery at the equivalent DVA fee for the open radical prostatectomy.

"In terms of requests from hospitals, DVA will not fund requests for the same reasons outlined above.

"DVA's decision in this matter reflects a departmental position to fund the requested treatment. It is not a direction to the treating doctor on whether to undertake the surgery, which is clearly a medical judgment."

"Any difficulties ... you may experience should be referred to your nearest Welfare Officer or Advocate."

Other DVA information

The latest issue of *e-News*, produced by the Department of Veterans' Affairs, covers:

- the new DVA web site live;
- the new Australian War Memorial London web site;
- single claim form trial begins;
- details of the Repatriation Medical Authority web site; and
- coming anniversaries

ARC among the big guns of choirs



Members of the Australian Rugby Choir outside the Australian War Memorial with one of HMAS Australia's big guns, now on permanent display in the grounds of the AWM.

The Australian Rugby Choir (ARC) continues its close association with the Australian War Memorial and ex-service ceremonies in 2009 after a great year in 2008, during which it participated in two international performances.

On October 29 last year the ARC was invited to support the international star Aled Jones in his recital at the Canberra Theatre to a packed house.

Again, on November 22, in a first for Canberra, the Male Choir Association of Australia (MCAA), conducted by the distinguished Welsh conductor Alwyn Humphries MBE, fielded a male choir of 300 voices in Llewellyn Hall.

Mr Humphries was recently named Conductor Emeritus and received several international awards.

This festival of male voices (of which the ARC contributed more than 50 members) again performed to a capacity house.

The money raised was donated to a fund for the treatment of prostate cancer and combating depression, both diseases prevalent among ex-servicemen.

As a result, the ARC has been invited to participate fully in future performances, in Sydney or Canberra.

For the remainder of 2008, the choir performed at more than 50 presentations including several plaque dedication ceremonies at the Australian War Memorial, all Rugby Union fixtures in Canberra involving the Brumbies team and several presentations at senior-citizen and ecumenical church functions.

Additionally, the ARC participated in five concerts, including a second massed-choir presentation at the Syd-

Australian Rugby Choir's links with AWM and veterans grow year by year

ney Opera House and an international gathering in September 2008 at Carnegie Hall, USA.

As will be appreciated, 2008 was a most successful year and 2009 seems likely to match it.

The choir resumed in February this year and so far has continued to perform at all plaque-dedication ceremonies with the Royal Military College Band.

The two most recent performances were a commemorative service to recognise the dedication and service of members of No. 3 Company AASC on March 6.

Brigadier David Saul AM, Head of Corps RACT, gave the address and also unveiled the commemorative plaque, accompanied by Mr Kevin Connelly, President No 3 Transport Association.

The second ceremony was the Annual Veterans' Community Aged Care wreath-laying ceremony on April 1.

The Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Alan Griffin, gave the commemorative address.

The National President of the RSL, Major General Bill Crews AO, recited

the *Ode*.

The director of the AWM, Major General Steve Gower AO, emphasised the significance and value of these commemorative dedication ceremonies and expressed the appreciation of the AWM for the continuing support of the Royal Military College Band and the Australian Rugby Choir.

As in the past, the ARC was fully involved musically in the ANZAC Day Service at the AWM.

The ARC has a number of ex-service members, some of whom were marching with their units in the parade.

At the conclusion of the ceremony these members usually attend at their respective service reunions, including those held by the Vietnam Veterans' Federation, RAAF Association and others, to celebrate and remember in the traditional manner.

These members contributed a few informal songs later at such welcoming venues as the Irish Club, Weston.

Clearly the ARC continues to have a full program for 2009.

Included was the annual ARC Fund Raising Concert, held at the Hughes Baptist Church on June 20, in company with the Woden Valley Youth Choir.

The ARC presented a comprehensive repertoire including selections from their appearances in late 2007 at the Sydney Opera House and the Aled Jones Concert in November 2008 in Canberra.

Any ex-service member interested in joining the ARC can contact the ARC Liaison Officer, John Prout, at (02) 62583151— email jmprout@bigpond.net.au