Specialists Better Route For Emergency Colon Surgery

Reuters – If you find yourself in need of emergency colon surgery, you'll be better off with a surgeon who specializes in operating on the large intestine, a new study from Spain shows. While colorectal surgery is a formally accepted specialty in the United States, Australia and other regions, this is not yet the case in Europe, Dr. Sebastiano Biondo and colleagues from the University of Barcelona note.

Emergency colon surgery may be performed to treat colorectal cancer, diverticulitis, lack of blood flow in the colon and other problems. Such emergencies are life-threatening and carry a high risk of complications and death, Biondo and his team note in the *Archives of Surgery*.

To investigate whether specially trained surgeons might do a better job than general surgeons, Biondo and his team looked at 1,046 patients who underwent emergency colon surgery at their hospital between 1993 and 2006. Just over one-third were operated on by a colorectal surgery specialist, while the rest were treated by a general surgeon. They found:

- Patients treated by colorectal surgery specialists were more likely than those treated by generalists to undergo single stage operations, rather than more complicated multiple-stage procedures.
- 52 percent of patients treated by specialists had complications after surgery, compared to 61 percent of those treated by general surgeons.
- 28 percent of patients treated by a general surgeon died after the surgery, compared with 18 percent of those treated by a specialist.
- In 12 percent of patients treated by general surgeons, the repaired area of the colon re-opened, compared to 6 percent of those treated by specialists.
- There were no differences between the two groups in the percentage of patients who needed additional surgery or the amount of time spent in the hospital after surgery.

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