Exercise test minimises risk for patients having surgery

A new test is helping ensure patients are fit for surgery and improve their health outcomes.

Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service (SCHHS) anaesthetic specialist Dr Ewan Wright, said cardiopulmonary exercise testing (CPX or CPET) was used to assess the cardiovascular and respiratory fitness of patients undergoing high-risk surgeries.

The test involves a short period of exercise on an exercise bike for about 10 minutes. Oxygen levels are measured, and the patient is monitored with an electrocardiogram (ECG) to identify any problems such as angina.

“We have tested 94 patients since November 2014 and the good news is that we are identifying those at risk,” Dr Wright said.

“CPX has significant advantages over conventional methods of risk assessment; it allows integrative assessment of multiple organs systems, unlike other tests which focus on only one system.

“It’s dynamic, providing important information about a patient’s physiological reserve. CPX also provides an accurate functional assessment, providing doctors with a meaningful number that correlates with operative risk.

“It is used in patients coming in for high risk procedures such as major cancer surgery or aneurysm surgery. We screen anybody over the age of 60 who is having major intra-abdominal surgery, or younger if they have cardiac/ respiratory disease.

“Surgeons or anaesthetists may also refer patients if they are concerned about operative risk.

“It also provides patients with a better idea of their risk of postoperative complications which may help patients decide if they wish to proceed with surgery.

Sixty-three year old Kevin Self from Yandina had bowel resection surgery at Nambour General Hospital in November 2015.

Mr Self spoke highly of the testing, which allowed his doctors to have a clearer understanding of his physical condition.

“I needed to have a bowel resection, to remove a diseased section of my large intestine,” Mr Self said.

“The aim of the CPX testing was to check my heart and lung function beforehand, to see if I was fit enough for the operation, and to see if I would need intensive care afterwards.”
“My heart and lung tests said I was fit enough for the operation, and it gave me peace of mind to know I was physically ready.

“It was good to know that the hospital’s risk assessment process was even better-informed and we could look forward to an even better health outcome,” he said.

Mr Self praised the staff at Nambour General Hospital and thanked them for all the help he had been given.

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