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## Former bladder patients in cancer scare

Hospitals around Australia have been urged to trace more than 200 former patients who underwent a type of bladder surgery since 1980 amid fears some may be at greater risk of contracting cancer. Melbourne's Royal Children's Hospital and the Monash Medical Centre are trying to contact 96 of their former patients who, over more than two decades, underwent bladder augmentation surgery using bowel tissue.

Royal Children's Hospital's head of urology Alan Woodward said a link had been made between the procedure and bladder cancer. Already one case had been detected in Victoria - a man who contracted bladder cancer after the procedure but had since recovered, Mr Woodward said. There was a second case in South Australia, although it was slightly different because that patient already had cancer before the surgery. Mr Woodward urged other hospitals who offered the same procedure to follow the lead of Royal Children's and the Monash Medical Centre and contact any of their former patients who had the operation. "All these hospitals do understand the problem and they are all following up their own patients," he said.

"We've taken the lead in Victoria. I suppose some state has got to take the lead.

"It has got to happen somewhere first. We are one of the first centres in the world to do it on a state-wide basis."

Mr Woodward estimated 200-250 people had undergone the surgery Australia-wide since it was pioneered in 1980. Bladder augmentation using bowel tissue is undertaken about twice a year at Melbourne Royal Children's. Those who have had the surgery include sufferers of Spina bifida, sacral agenesis and bladder exstrophy. The procedure involves attaching a piece of bowel to the bladder to keep their kidneys healthy and treat incontinence. The cancers have appeared where the bowel is attached to the bladder. Mr Woodward said the link between the procedure and bladder cancer was made in the United States in 2004. Hospitals had been making every effort to alert former patients, but some may not have returned for treatment for a number of years and they must be traced. The Royal Children's Hospital continued to offer the surgery, but warns patients and their families of the risks, Mr Woodward said.

The president of the Spina bifida Foundation of Victoria, John Simmons, said his child had undergone the surgery about 10 years ago and he would have it done again, despite the risks. "People with Spina bifida have long-term issues they have to deal with, and this is just one of those issues we deal with along the way," Mr Simmons said.

Former patients of the Royal Children's Hospital and Monash Medical Centre who have undergone the procedure are urged to contact Jacqui Burton on (03) 9345 6546, speak to their general practitioner, and see a specialist urologist to have an annual cystoscopy check.