

# Feedback and Complaints

## Frequently asked questions

(Australia) 1800 892 491 or  
(New Zealand) 0800 787 470

The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) has revised its complaints framework and the way it handles concerns about bullying, discrimination and sexual harassment.

Here are some answers to frequently asked questions about our Feedback and Complaints process.

### What has changed?

Our approach to handling complaints and feedback is relevant to our profession, our role and our commitment to building respect and improving patient safety. We are focused on supporting professionalism in surgery and making sure that all concerns and complaints are handled by the agency best placed to manage them. There is a clear role for the College, employers and other agencies which have different legal powers.

Our complaints framework balances our duty of care to our trainees and surgeons, to provide a safe environment, our responsibility to provide a procedurally fair and timely process, our professional commitment to build a culture of respect and our legal and ethical responsibilities as a College.

### What does RACS do?

RACS Feedback and Complaints process aims to help build a culture of respect. It is informal and non-judgmental.

We can tell you about your options and help you work out what to do next. We might refer you to another agency when it is better suited to addressing your concern. We will respect your wishes as we work through the issues with you.

We will support you through our process, or another if others are handling your concern.

RACS uses peer to peer conversations to help build a culture of respect in surgery. Getting

feedback can help someone understand the impact of their behaviour and gives them a reason to do things differently.

Our Speciality Training Boards work with hospitals through the accreditation of training posts, to make sure there is a safe training environment for trainees.

### What do other complaints agencies do?

- If you are worried about the outcome of surgery, or surgical fees and costs, or if you want compensation, your local health complaints commissions can help
- If you are concerned about discrimination, bullying or sexual harassment, we will talk with you about whether your employer, hospital, health service, or RACS is best placed to help
- When patient safety is at risk regulators, like the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Authority (Ahpra) and the Medical Council of New Zealand handle the most serious matters

- The police deal with criminal behaviour.

Within RACS, but outside the Feedback and Complaints process:

- Our People and Culture team handle concerns about staff
- The Reconsideration, Review and Appeal (RRA) process deals with appeals of RACS' assessment and other decisions
- The Professional Conduct Committee handles the most serious matters, when another agency with legislative powers has made a formal adverse finding. There is a clear threshold and natural justice principles for these referrals.

## What about confidentiality and anonymity?

We respect your wishes about confidentiality.

Not everyone wants to make a formal complaint. Sometimes, they want to raise a concern or give us information, so we can look into it and help resolve the problem. We record all feedback and complaints for record keeping purposes.

Sometimes people feel comfortable putting their name to the issue they have raised, and sometimes they don't. This is ok. We can progress an issue without identifying the individual who has raised a concern, but we need to know who they are.

Understandably, some complaints we receive are made anonymously. We record these, but most of the time we can't progress them.

## What happens when you call us?

Our Feedback and Complaints team talk through all enquiries, concerns and complaints. Sometimes, this conversation helps clarify whether other agencies are better placed to deal with the issue. We will support you to raise your concern with the agency best placed to address it, or support you through our process.

We give you information, talk through your options and make a record of the call.

All formal complaints are triaged in a timely way and a decision made about what happens next.

Our Executive Directors for Surgical Affairs are involved when RACS handles a matter.

## What is a profession-led conversation?

There is a significant body of evidence showing that it is very helpful to provide timely, non-judgemental feedback to a surgeon whose behaviour has caused concern or distress to someone else. Simply letting them know that someone was adversely affected by their behaviour or conduct, without judging it or trying to work out who is right, triggers reflection and positive change. Sometimes, the surgeon is unaware that their behaviour or language has caused distress.

We use this approach when managing some of the enquiries and concerns raised with us. Often, the person who has raised the concern only wants the problem fixed or the behaviour changed. The surgeon who receives the feedback usually reflects on their behaviour, gains new insights, understands the impact it has had and modifies their behaviour.

Our Executive Directors for Surgical Affairs are surgeons and Fellows of the College and they lead this approach, which is consistent with the principles of natural justice and procedural fairness. It is collegial and non-judgemental and aims to encourage self-reflection and behaviour change.

Our success in complaints management long term will be measured by the surgeons who improve their practice, increase their professional skills and help foster a culture of respect in surgery.

## What is the role of Specialty Training Boards?

Our Specialty Training Boards have an important role in the Feedback and Complaints process, given their responsibility to provide a safe and optimal learning environment for trainees.

The level of detail provided to training boards is determined by the confidentiality request of the person raising the issue.

Information is used to monitor the training and workplace environment, and to ensure a coordinated approach to the tracking and management of complaints and allegations about discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment.

Training Boards use de-identified and collated statistical information about complaints and concerns to inform the hospital training-post accreditation process.

## How will RACS support me if I raise a concern?

We are committed to supporting both the person raising the issue and the person responding to it. We do this by:

- Offering information about confidentiality, privacy and anonymity
- Helping you navigate external complaints processes and staying in touch, or supporting you through our process
- Encouraging Fellows, Trainees, and Specialist International Medical Graduates on a pathway to Fellowship to contact RACS Support Program provided by Converge International. This program provides confidential support to surgeons and their immediate family, for any personal or work-related issue.
- Monitoring and facilitating a safe training environment, through our Specialty Training Boards and hospitals.

Support

Guidance

## How do I access the Support Program?

The RACS Surgeons Support Program is provided by Converge International. It is a confidential free support service available to RACS Fellows, Trainees and International Medical Graduates and their immediate family.

- 24/7 emergency telephone counselling
- Call 1300 687 327 (Australia)
- Call 0800 666 367 (New Zealand)
- Email [eap@convergeintl.com.au](mailto:eap@convergeintl.com.au)
- Website [www.convergeinternational.com.au](http://www.convergeinternational.com.au)

For more information about RACS Surgeons Support Program visit [surgeons.org](http://surgeons.org).

## Want to give us feedback on our service?

We welcome your feedback and comments about our service and are always looking for ways to improve. You can email your comments about our service to us at [complaints@surgeons.org](mailto:complaints@surgeons.org)



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*Let's operate with respect*