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The Hon. Daniel Andrews MP
Premier of Victoria
1 Treasury Place
MELBOURNE, VIC 3000

21 June 2017

Dear Premier,

Violence against health care workers

We write in relation to the recent attack on surgeon Patrick Pritzwald-Stegmann.

As the leading advocate for surgical standards, professionalism in surgery and surgical education in Australia and New Zealand, the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) is committed to taking informed and principled positions on issues of public health at both state and federal levels. RACS represents more than 7000 surgeons and 1300 Surgical Trainees and International Medical Graduates (IMGs) across Australia and New Zealand.

RACS believes that violence is unacceptable in any workplace. No employee should be expected to accept any form of physical or verbal violence or abuse as part of their work environment. This type of behaviour is particularly deplorable when it is directed at health care workers.

The recent attack on surgeon Patrick Pritzwald-Stegmann highlights the real and serious risks that health care workers face, even in locations that should be places of safety.

RACS acknowledges the strong, bi-partisan approach taken towards the issue of violence against health care workers over the past few years in Victoria with a number of strategies implemented since 2014 but more needs to be done.

With Mr Pritzwald-Stegmann in a serious condition, and his ultimate outcome and recovery unknown, RACS believes that this attack will ultimately be a test of the new minimum mandatory sentencing regulations introduced under the *Sentencing Amendment Act (Emergency Workers) Bill* in July 2015. This Legislation has now been in operation for two years and reports of violence against health care workers continue to increase.

Whilst RACS acknowledges that the Government has no role in the sentencing of any person charged with an offense the public visibility of these laws and the application of these laws is a key tool in changing community attitudes. RACS believes that a review of the utilisation and effectiveness of these laws is timely and recommends that it be referred to the Victorian Auditor General's Office (VAGO) or an appropriate Parliamentary Committee for investigation.

RACS would also encourage greater investment in increasing and improving security staff and training across the broader health care system. The implementation of observations rooms and specialised areas in hospitals is a positive one but as recent attacks have shown the violence and abuse often occurs in settings outside of the emergency department. Boosting security services, and appropriate training for security personnel, should be prioritised across the Victorian system to ensure that health care workers have a greater level of protection in all settings.

RACS would also like to make note of the new *It's never OK* campaign. The overall campaign is a positive one and sends a firm message that violence against health care workers is not acceptable in any situation. However, the campaign does not include a dedicated advertisement for doctors. Doctors in all situations experience violence and aggression and RACS believes that this campaign could be strengthened by including doctors in the advertising.

If you would like to discuss this issue further please contact Mr David Love via the RACS Victorian Regional Office.

Yours sincerely,



Mr John Batten
President



Mr David Love
Chair, Victorian Regional Committee

CC: The Hon. Jill Hennessy MP, Victorian Minister for Health
CC: The Hon. Matthew Guy MP, Leader of the Opposition
CC: The Hon. Mary Wooldridge MP, Shadow Minister for Health