

13.12.22

The Hon. Mark Butler MP
Minister for Health and Aged Care

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Via email: minister.butler@health.gov.au

Dear Minister Butler

Re: Respect@Work

I write on behalf of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) to commend the Australian Government, and the Australian Human Rights Commission, on the recent passage of legislation, confirming the adoption of all the recommendations outlined in the Respect@Work report.

It is extremely pleasing to see action to secure the positive duty on employers to take action in regards to providing workplaces free of sexual harassment, We appreciate this on behalf of our surgical Trainees, and all Fellows and Specialist International Graduates working in healthcare.

RACS is the leading advocate for surgical standards, professionalism and surgical education in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, and we take issues of workplace safety and respect very seriously. Our commitment to this issue was particularly heightened by the findings of a landmark 2015 report into the experiences of surgical Fellows, Trainees and Specialist International Medical Graduates, which found that nearly half of all surgeons across all specialties had experienced discrimination, bullying or sexual harassment.

At that time, RACS undertook to implement the Building Respect Improving Patient Safety initiative - a comprehensive, evidence-based strategy to build respect and improve patient safety in surgery, developed by an independent Expert Advisory Group (EAG), with a specific focus on discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment.

In September 2021, RACS re-convened an EAG to review the progress made by the College community since 2015, and to advise on a framework for future action. The [2022 EAG Report and Action Plan](#) found that our first six years' work has built significant awareness and understanding of the need for surgeons to operate with respect, but that there is still much work to be done across health care, to foster professional behaviour.



RACS is keen to continue to work with state and territory governments, as well as other health workforce stakeholders, on the development of policies, programs and processes to deal with discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment in surgery and the wider health sector.

Yours sincerely

Dr Sally Langley
President

Professor Mark Frydenberg
Councillor, Chair – Health Policy &
Advocacy Committee

cc: The Hon. Mark Dreyfus MP, Attorney General