

## Media Statement

10 September 2015

### Expert Advisory Group Report and Research Published

The Expert Advisory Group (EAG) has handed its Draft Report to the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) and published reports of research into discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment in the practice of surgery.

Very significant participation rates in the research have established beyond doubt the scope of these problems. The research found that:

- 49% of Fellows, Trainees and International Medical Graduates (IMGs) report being subjected to discrimination, bullying or sexual harassment
- 54% of Trainees and 45% of Fellows less than 10 years post-fellowship report being subjected to bullying
- 71% of hospitals reported discrimination, bullying or sexual harassment in their hospital in the last five years, with bullying the most frequently reported issue
- 39% of Fellows, Trainees and IMGs report bullying, 18% report discrimination, 19% report workplace harassment and 7% sexual harassment
- the problems exist across all surgical specialties, and
- senior surgeons and surgical consultants are reported as the primary source of these problems.

The Draft Report reflects the findings and feedback from five major pieces of work commissioned by the EAG in 2015, all of which are published on the College website and include quantitative, qualitative and organisational research.

'Now that the extent and impact of these issues is clear, there can be no turning back,' said EAG Chair, the Hon. Rob Knowles AO.

'We have been shocked by what we have heard. The time for action has come,' Mr Knowles said.

'The College must be bold and embrace this opportunity to make lasting, positive change. There is no room for bystanders and hospitals, employers, governments, health professional and industrial associations, and other partners in the health sector must also meet their responsibilities and make a sustained commitment to action,' he said.

The Draft Report identifies three core areas for action:

1. Culture and leadership
2. Surgical education and
3. Complaints management.

It highlights gender inequity as a central issue that must be addressed and outlines what RACS must do – alone and in partnership – to address and prevent discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment in the practice of surgery.

The Draft Report calls for increased transparency, independent scrutiny and external accountability to be fully integrated into RACS operations.

'This is essential for the College to earn back confidence and trust, inspire professionalism and drive cultural change, and prevent conflicts of interest. Above all, it is needed to make the surgical workplace safe,' Mr Knowles said.

# Expert Advisory Group

on discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment  
*Advising the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons*

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ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN  
COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

The Draft Report is now open for comment about errors of fact or suggestions for action that will strengthen the EAG's recommendations. Comment can be emailed to [eag@surgeons.org](mailto:eag@surgeons.org) by 18 September 2015, before the EAG finalises its recommendations to the College on 21 September 2015.

The EAG thanked those who took the time and made the effort to participate in the research and said the courage of individuals who shared their personal stories had given depth to the EAG's understanding of the problems.

The EAG congratulated RACS for establishing the EAG and providing it with the resources to do its work.

'The College has made a serious commitment to understanding the scope of these problems and seeking the best possible advice about how to deal with them,' Mr Knowles said.

'We sincerely hope that the work of the EAG has created a tipping point for action – by the College, Specialty Societies, employers, governments and other partners in the healthcare sector – that will increase patient safety by making discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment in the practice of surgery a thing of the past,' Mr Knowles said.

**Media enquiries:** Nicole Newton, Mobile: 0407 998 611