ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

MEDIA RELEASE

RACS establishes expert advisory group to combat bullying and harassment

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The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) has moved swiftly to establish an expert advisory group to deal with concerns of bullying, harassment and discrimination in the health sector.

RACS President Michael Grigg said there was no denying that bullying and harassment occurred within the health workforce and the College of Surgeons had zero tolerance for this behaviour.

"The expert advisory group's charter will include reviewing the College's current policies and procedures, establishing a reporting framework to measure progress in dealing with bullying and harassment, addressing the College's gender balance and acting as a medium between the College and the hospitals/health departments to provide a way forward to eliminating bullying and harassment," Prof Grigg said.

Professor Grigg said that the new group would be chaired by former Victorian Health Minister and current Chair of the Royal Children's Hospital, the Hon Rob Knowles AO.

"Dr Helen Szoke, the current CEO of Oxfam, but previously Australia's Federal Race Discrimination Commissioner following seven years as the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner, has agreed to be Deputy Chair," the RACS President said.

Dr Joanna Flynn AM, Chair of the Medical Board of Australia and Mr Ken Lay APM, former Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police have also agreed to act on the group as have Mr Graeme Campbell, the College's incoming Vice President and Dr Cathy Ferguson, the incoming Chair of the College's Professional Standards.

"This group will comprise of individuals with substantial experience in equal opportunity, racial discrimination and regulatory issues," Prof Grigg said.

"Bullying and harassment must be notified and must be investigated. This is fundamental to correcting behaviour and ensuring inappropriate decisions or actions are addressed.

Professor Grigg said that the issue of harassment and bullying was much bigger than any one hospital and the College had already written to all Ministers of Health across Australia and New Zealand seeking to engage positively with them to improve the culture of hospitals and the health care sector.

The College recognises there are problems but is determined to be part of the solution.

About the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS)

RACS is the leading advocate for surgical standards, professionalism and surgical education in Australia and New Zealand. The College is a not-for-profit organisation that represents more than 7000 surgeons and 1300 surgical trainees and International Medical Graduates. RACS also supports healthcare and surgical education in the Asia-Pacific region and is a substantial funder of surgical research. There are nine surgical specialties in Australasia being: Cardiothoracic surgery, General surgery, Neurosurgery, Orthopaedic surgery, Otolaryngology Head-and-Neck surgery, Paediatric surgery, Plastic and Reconstructive surgery, Urology and Vascular surgery.

www.surgeons.org

Media inquiries: **Greg Meyer**
Manager, Communications & Advocacy
Royal Australasian College of Surgeons
(03) 9249 1263 Mob: 0429 028 933