

Expert Advisory Group on discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment

Advising The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons

Joint Statement from the Expert Advisory Group and Royal Australasian College of Surgeons



ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN
COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

Preventing discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment by surgeons in Australia and New Zealand

There is no place for discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment in the College or in any modern workplace.

It is insidious, unprofessional and can have a terrible adverse impact on people subjected to it. Discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment demean individuals and prevent them from reaching their true potential. It is responsible for the loss of valuable talent from the profession.

We all lose from discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment and we are all responsible for preventing it.

Recent media reports profiling discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment by surgeons have been distressing. The reports have highlighted the serious adverse impact it can have on the lives of good people. They have criticised the College for not doing enough to prevent it. The reports helped galvanise the College to act decisively now.

The College will not miss this opportunity to do what it takes to prevent discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment by surgeons. We will lead our profession and the health sector to identify the causes, and find solutions.

We will start by examining and fixing what is wrong with our own processes, operations and ways of working. We will work in partnership with hospitals, employers and the wider health sector to influence others so our workplaces are safe and free from discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment. We expect there will be a range of short and long-term actions we will need to take to achieve cultural change.

Discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment are unacceptable anywhere. Everyone in the College – fellows, trainees and international medical graduates – has a role in making sure we meet the challenge of preventing it. The College must set clear guidelines that effectively shape the behaviour and practice of everyone in the college community. We must support those who are or have been affected by discrimination, bullying or sexual harassment. And we must make sure there is an avenue for complaints, which will be independently reviewed and managed sensitively and effectively.

The College has established an Expert Advisory Group (EAG), to tell us what we need to do to prevent discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment in the practice of surgery in Australia and New Zealand. We have asked for advice that is fearless and comprehensive. To do its job, the EAG will be resourced and supported by the College, but is independent of it. The EAG terms of reference are public and give the group wide ranging authority.

The EAG has started work and is:

- Commissioning new prevalence research into discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment in the practice of surgery in Australia and New Zealand, through a quantitative survey
- Creating an avenue to hear from individuals (identified or confidentially) who have been affected by discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment in the practice of surgery, so their experiences can deepen the EAG's understanding of the problem and its systemic and cultural causes
- Commissioning research and literature reviews to find out what other organisations – in the health sector and more generally - have done to deal effectively with discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment and find strategies to prevent it

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- Committed to engaging with stakeholders to make sure it has a comprehensive understanding of the problem, its causes, and the solutions needed to ensure that discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment in the practice of surgery is not tolerated and is eliminated into the future
- Finalising the processes it will put in place to hear from individuals about their experiences of discrimination, bullying or sexual harassment in the practice of surgery, and to engage with stakeholders about this critical issue. To make sure the EAG's advice to the College is well informed, the process will be comprehensive and include a range of options.

The EAG has noted that the College has:

- put in place an [interim process](#) to manage complaints about discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment, pending further advice from the EAG
- ensured fellows, trainees and international medical graduates have access to a [program to support](#) people who have been subject to discrimination, bullying or sexual harassment

As a priority, the EAG will promote opportunities for interested stakeholders to engage with its work and share their experiences. It will progressively publish more detail as these options are finalised. Additional information, including terms of reference and a list of members, are published on a [dedicated page](#) on the College website.

The College will continue to work with fellows, trainees and international medical graduates to meet this challenge. We will take every opportunity to lead the way to prevent discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment in the practice of surgery in Australia and New Zealand, and to support those who have suffered from it.

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