

Expert Advisory Group on discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment

Advising The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons

Media Release



ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN
COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

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Expert group launches campaign on discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment

A multi-pronged campaign to reveal the extent of discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment in the practice of surgery, and find ways of stopping it, is being launched today by the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons' Expert Advisory Group.

The wide-ranging consultation and engagement campaign includes an independent survey of all College fellows, trainees and international medical graduates to find out the scope of the problem.

As well, the advisory group is calling for people who have been exposed to discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment but who do not wish to make a formal complaint, to come forward and share their experience.

And next month, the advisory group will publish an Issues Paper – informed by research – and seek feedback about the cause of the problem and the actions needed to prevent discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment in the practice of surgery.

Advisory Group Chair the Hon Rob Knowles AO said it was vital that the advisory group heard from as many people as possible through the survey and interviews to help inform any recommendations made by the group.

“Understanding issues of discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment needs more than data,” Mr Knowles said.

“To get to the bottom of systemic and cultural causes of discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment, the advisory group wants to hear the personal stories of people who have experienced this behaviour in the practice of surgery or by surgeons.”

Prevalence survey – quantitative research

The advisory group is urging all fellows, trainees and international medical graduates of the College to complete a survey to scope the extent of discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment in the practice of surgery in Australia and New Zealand.

The prevalence survey – conducted by an independent research agency - is the cornerstone of quantitative research commissioned by the EAG.

The independent research company will email the survey directly to all College members to generate accurate prevalence data. Responses will be anonymous and a report of the results published. The survey will be open for four weeks and is being managed by Best Practice Australia.

“Our advice to the College must be evidence-based, so we want all College fellows, trainees and international medical graduates to take the time to complete the survey, so the data about the extent of these problems is accurate and up to date,” Mr Knowles said.

Sharing experiences – qualitative research

The advisory group wants to hear from people who have been exposed to discrimination, bullying and harassment, who want to share their experiences but who do not want to make a formal complaint. The advisory group has set up a confidential pathway to hear from individuals willing to share their experiences, so the group better understands the problem and can recommend ways to stop it.

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Individuals - identified or confidentially – can tell their story by telephone, Skype or if needed, face-to-face interview with a qualified and independent researcher, or they can complete an online questionnaire. More detail about how to share your experience of discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment is published on the website.

Independent agency, Converge International, will collect and thematically analyse these personal stories and experiences to inform the work of the advisory group. This work will identify systemic issues within the practice and culture of surgery that contribute to discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment.

'We want to understand the impact of discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment and learn from people who know, so the advice we give the College is relevant and constructive,' Mr Knowles said.

Issues paper

The advisory group will be publishing and consulting on an Issues Paper that will highlight the themes our research indicates are central to discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment in the practice of surgery. The Issues Paper will draw on research summarised in a background briefing paper.

The advisory group will consult with stakeholders to make sure we have identified the right issues to address and to seek ideas about effective strategies to deal with them.

The advisory group will publish the Issues Paper and background briefing paper in June 2015 and actively promote opportunities for stakeholders to discuss the issues and provide feedback.

The advisory group will publish more detail as consultation and engagement options are finalised.

Next steps

1. May 2015 – June 2015: Independent quantitative prevalence survey of College fellows, trainees and international medical graduates in Australia and New Zealand. Direct email from independent research agency Best Practice Australia being sent progressively from today to all College members.
2. May 2015 – June 2015: Call for personal stories and experiences of discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment in the practice of surgery. Share experiences confidentially with experienced researchers by telephone, skype, online survey or face to face interview if needed. Independently managed by Converge International.
3. June 2015: Publish and consult on an Issues Paper, informed by a background briefing paper. Seeking feedback about causes, general themes and the actions needed to prevent discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment in the practice of surgery. Learn from other agencies in the health sector and more widely about effective strategies.

Background

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

- Read the joint statement from the College and the Expert Advisory Group
- Read the Terms of Reference for the Expert Advisory Group
- Read the prevalence survey that will be emailed directly to all College members
- Find out how to share your experience of discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment with the EAG
- Make a complaint to the College about discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment
- Access or find out more about the RACS surgeons support program

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