



30 September 2015

## **The Australian Medical Council welcomes the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons' response to the *Report of the Expert Advisory Group on discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment.***

It commends the College for taking seriously the allegations of discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment by surgeons, investigating them thoroughly, and making public the findings and recommendations of its Expert Advisory Group.

The AMC is the national accreditation and standards body for the medical profession. It sets accreditation standards for medical programs, assesses programs against the standards and accredits programs that meet the standards. The specialist medical programs and continuing professional development programs of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons are accredited by the AMC.

AMC President Professor Robin Mortimer AO said, "The College oversees surgical education and training programs that are innovative, and focussed on producing safe, competent and high quality specialist surgeons. In response to the report of the Expert Advisory Group the College has committed itself to profound cultural and institutional changes and changes to how it manages surgical training, surgical trainees and supervision. College trainees and their supervisors are usually employees of health care institutions and in working with these stakeholders to make changes, the College will contribute to developing a professional culture that does not tolerate discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment, and that supports doctors in training speaking out when appropriate professional standards are not reached. The AMC looks forward to working with the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons as they develop an action plan to address the issues raised in the report."

The AMC has just completed a review of the *Standards for Assessment and Accreditation of Specialist Medical Education Programs and Professional Development Programs*, which are used to assess whether specialist medical programs and the colleges that provide the programs produce graduates with the knowledge, skills and professional attributes necessary to practise medicine in Australia. Chair of the AMC's review of the standards, and Deputy President of the AMC Associate Professor Jill Sewell AM said, "This is the first major review of the standards since 2010 when the AMC's accreditation role was strengthened by the introduction of national legislation – the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law – covering accreditation of health practitioner programs in Australia. This review has strengthened standards in several areas relevant to the report by the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons."

The revised standards have an increased focus on trainee wellbeing. New standards require specialist medical colleges to promote a supportive learning environment for doctors in training, and to collaborate with other stakeholders, especially employers, to identify and

support trainees who are experiencing personal and/or professional difficulties that may affect their training. The standards also require colleges to take account of the health, welfare and interests of trainees when they accredit health services as training sites. Requirements for colleges to have external stakeholder input to decision-making processes, and to identify and manage conflicts of interest in training and education decision-making have been strengthened. The revised standards will be implemented from 1 January 2016.

Professor Sewell said “The AMC has consulted widely on the revisions, and they have strong support, including from the specialist medical colleges and from doctors in training. The revised standards, together with introduction of the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, have strengthened the AMC’s powers and responsibilities as the accreditation body for specialist medical programs. There are now good mechanisms for external accountability on how all colleges address issues of trainee wellbeing in Australia, as well as in New Zealand through the Medical Council of New Zealand and the AMC joint accreditation of specialist medical training and education in New Zealand.”

Doctors in specialist medical training often fear speaking up about poor quality supervision and training, and issues such as bullying, discrimination and sexual harassment because of concerns about career implications and the confidentiality and safety of complaints and review processes. In the medical training and education system in Australia and New Zealand, both colleges and health services have roles in setting standards for and delivering training and education, and trainees can also be unclear about where to address complaints. To address these concerns, the AMC has been investigating the approach in the United Kingdom, where a national training survey is used to gather confidential feedback on training programs and providers. The survey is managed by the General Medical Council, which gives the data to education providers so they can improve their own approaches, and then checks through its quality assurance processes that issues are addressed by individual providers and, through thematic enquiries, across the specialist training system.

AMC President, Professor Mortimer said, “The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons has undertaken comprehensive research and consultation with internal and external stakeholders in its investigation. But the report draws attention to how fear about the impact on career or training of making a complaint can effectively stop people from reporting complaints or speaking out. The AMC and others have long argued for an annual national training survey in Australia to gather regular confidential feedback from doctors in training on the quality of their medical training and to ensure that the feedback is addressed. This report demonstrates again the value of an independent national training survey.”

Australian Medical Council

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