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URGENT NEED TO TIGHTEN RULES ON USE OF ‘SURGEON’ TO PROTECT PUBLIC SAFETY, WARNS AMA

Four Corners program highlights risks of surgery and need for specialist medical college accreditation.

The AMA says the title ‘surgeon’ should be reserved for medical practitioners who have obtained specialist medical college accreditation, and objects to the use of the term ‘cosmetic surgeon’ where a practitioner is not recognised as a surgical specialist.

The AMA says only medical practitioners with a Fellowship from an Australian Medical Council (AMC) accredited specialist medical college, whose training program includes a surgical component **relevant to their field of expertise**, should be allowed to use the ‘surgeon’ title.

Patients can be misled by the term ‘cosmetic surgeon’ or ‘podiatric surgeon’, believing they are dealing with a medical practitioner who has formal and specific surgical qualifications when in fact they may not.

AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid said the loophole needs to be closed, but action is required from health ministers.

“Many Australians will be shocked to know you can call yourself a cosmetic surgeon without any specific surgical training whatsoever as there’s no restriction on the use of the term ‘surgeon’ by doctors or by other health practitioners,” Dr Khorshid said.

Health ministers have been consulting on reforms to the regulatory scheme governing all health practitioners in Australia since July 2018. They supported restrictions to the use of titles ‘surgeon’ and ‘cosmetic surgeon’ but announced that further consultation would need to occur.

The AMA supports this reform and urges health ministers to finally complete the work they began over three years ago.

“Safe surgery required high levels of training- there are no short cuts. To protect the public, anyone using the term ‘surgeon’ must be a medical practitioner who has had the appropriate qualifications and credentialling that guarantees a minimum level of training and expertise as well as oversight of standards of practice and ethical behaviour.

“Surgery is as successful as it is because of the education and training processes, the regulatory processes, and because Colleges set standards and hold their members to account. That’s why we need to close the loopholes that allow practitioners to call themselves surgeons without necessarily meeting the necessary standards.” Dr Khorshid said.

The AMA supports changing the National Law to make it clear to patients that anyone using the title surgeon can only do so because they are a medical practitioner who has met and continues to meet the standards necessary for Fellowship of the relevant surgical college.

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