

Australian Medical Association Limited

ABN 37 008 426 793

42 Macquarie Street, Barton ACT 2600: PO Box 6090, Kingston ACT 2604

Telephone: (02) 6270 5400 Facsimile (02) 6270 5499

Website: www.ama.com.au



AMA calls for legislation to tackle widespread bullying of doctors in training

The results of the [2021 Medical Training Survey](#) show bullying, harassment and discrimination experienced by doctors in training continues to be widespread and the Australian Medical Association (AMA) calls on state and territories to act now to address the underlying factors that can lead to this type of unacceptable behaviour.

The 2021 MTS survey funded by the Medical Board of Australia found that the trainees in states and territories worst hit by the pandemic were more likely to report COVID-19 had adversely impacted on their medical training.

AMA President Dr Omar Khorshid said the survey demonstrated the need to act now to tackle systemic issues impacting the training and wellbeing of doctors in training (DiT).

“The 2021 survey again finds doctors in training reporting unacceptable levels of bullying, discrimination and harassment and a reluctance to report it,” Dr Khorshid said.

“Seven out of 10 DiTs experienced bullying, discrimination and harassment saying it had adversely affected their medical training.

“It’s time for state and territory health departments to get serious about valuing the time doctors in training spend learning and providing excellent patient care by reviewing and providing appropriate staffing and adopting better rostering practices.

“They also need to take concrete steps to guarantee a safe working environment for doctors and other staff in public hospitals.”

The survey found more than one in three DiTs had experienced and/or witnessed bullying, harassment and/or discrimination, including racism in the past 12 months before completing the survey.

DiTs who experienced bullying, harassment or discrimination were more likely to report it (33 per cent) than those who witnessed it (24 per cent) with only half indicating the report had been followed up.

Forty-five per cent of DiTs said they never/sometimes got paid for unrostered overtime and 49 per cent rated their workload as heavy/very heavy.

“Turning a blind eye to practices that allow doctors to work excessive unpaid, unrostered overtime is not only inefficient and unproductive, but it puts patient care and doctor wellbeing at risk,” Dr Khorshid said.

“Very disturbingly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctors in training reported higher levels of bullying, discrimination and harassment, including racism, compared to non-Indigenous colleagues.”

“No one should experience racial discrimination, harassment or vilification in their place of work and/or learning environment. Our workplaces benefit when they harness the skills and perspectives of all peoples that make up Australia. It is vital that doctors and medical students can practice in a culturally safe environment where cultural differences are acknowledged and respected.”

Dr Khorshid said the AMA wanted legislative changes in all states and territories to improve health service leadership, governance and accountability to provide a culturally and psychologically safe work environment for all employees.

Dr Hash Abdeen, Chair AMA Council of Doctors in Training, said the survey also found that despite interruptions to training because of COVID-19, many trainees rated their training experience highly in the 2021 survey.

“This is a testament to the high quality of training in Australia and commitment from supervisors, Colleges and senior medical staff to supporting trainee during this challenging time,” Dr Abdeen said.

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