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Swift action required on cosmetic surgery

1st September 2022.

The Australian Medical Association (AMA) is calling for swift action by Ministers following the delivery of a review into cosmetic surgery regulation in Australia, including an immediate start to the work necessary to ban the use of the term 'surgeon' by anyone other than medical practitioners with significant accredited surgical training.

The AMA is also calling on health ministers to act on the key recommendations when they meet tomorrow (Friday 2nd Sept 2022) and additionally calls on the Queensland parliament to ditch legislation permitting practitioners using testimonials, including those performing cosmetic surgery.

In welcoming the release of the independent review into cosmetic surgery regulation by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulatory Agency (Ahpra) and the Medical Board of Australia (MBA), the AMA said an initial review of the 16 recommendations showed they appeared to be a positive step in the right direction, but many details still needed to be finalised in consultation with the profession.

AMA President Professor Steve Robson said, "While it will take time to implement some of these changes, Ahpra and the MBA need to swiftly act on those recommendations which can bring about change now, including a crackdown on advertising.

"Importantly, at their meeting on Friday, health ministers could make a decision to protect patients by restricting the title 'surgeon' to those medical practitioners who have undertaken a significant, accredited surgical training program.

"Health ministers have been dragging their feet in looking into the use of the title 'surgeon' since 2018 in a separate review. Taking action on protecting the title of 'surgeon' will support many of the initiatives in the report. Health ministers can no longer delay taking decisive action.

"We've all been shocked by the stomach-turning cases of botched cosmetic surgery reported in the media again and we need to stop these wholly inappropriate practises.

"The Queensland parliament can also play a role by dropping legislation before it which permits health practitioners to use testimonials to support their work.

"Testimonials can be fake or taken out of context and there are limited protections in the Bill which will prove to be unenforceable and likely lead to increased harm, complications and worse health outcomes for many consumers," Professor Robson said.

The key recommendations include:

- Requiring medical practitioners who perform cosmetic surgery to have a specific cosmetic surgery endorsement on their registration,
- Cracking down on advertising and the improper use of testimonials, and
- Establishing a specific Cosmetic Surgery Enforcement Unit within Ahpra

In addition, the AMA is pleased to see the statement from Ahpra and the MBA that they would welcome action from health ministers to restrict the use the title of “surgeon”, something that the AMA has been calling for over a number of years.

The AMA has expressed its concern for many years patients could 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.

The AMA supports restricting the use of the title “surgeon” to those medical practitioners who have undertaken a significant surgical training program provided by an Australian Medical Council (AMC) accredited education provider.

“There are many reputable doctors with extensive experience and recognised surgical qualifications who are performing cosmetic surgery to the highest of standards and it is deeply unfortunate that we have seen patients harmed as a result of the actions of a minority of doctors,” Professor Robson said.

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