



**AUSTRALIAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION**  
**(SOUTH AUSTRALIA) INC.**  
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## **BULLYING STILL A HEALTH HAZARD IN SOUTH AUSTRALIAN HOSPITALS**

**A national survey of the country's doctors in training shows bullying and harassment are still major issues for South Australia's junior doctors, affecting their health, professional advancement and capacity to care for their patients.**

AMA(SA) Doctors in Training Committee Chair Dr Hayden Cain said the latest South Australian Hospital Health Check (HHC) data – to be launched at AMA(SA) offices at Fullarton this morning – showed more than 20% of trainee doctors at each major public hospital reported having been bullied or harassed in the 12 months before they completed the survey.

**AMA(SA) President Dr John Williams and AMA(SA) Doctors in Training Committee Chair Dr Hayden Cain will be available for interviews at the AMA(SA) office at 1/175 Fullarton Road, Dulwich, at 11 am on Friday, 2 June 2023.**

**Dr Williams has limited availability for radio/press interviews from 9 am to 10 am, after the Crazy Socks 4 Docs Breakfast at the Adelaide Convention Centre.**

Dr Cain said more than one-third of respondents reported witnessing bullying or harassment, with the highest incidence (41%) at the Women's and Children's Hospital.

'While we must acknowledge the strains that COVID-19 and the junior doctor shortage in Australia have placed on the state's health system, we are now well past the period of lockdowns,' Dr Cain said. 'Still, the survey data is showing that working conditions for junior doctors are not improving.'

'It may appear that we should be relieved that there is a lower rate of experienced bullying than witnessed bullying. However, we believe this is not because the bullying is not occurring but that many junior doctors don't report bullying when it occurs.'

'Our data demonstrates that significant numbers of junior doctors – well over half of respondents at some hospitals – choose not to report bullying, either because they don't believe there will be repercussions for the perpetrator or because they are worried about the impacts of reporting on their own careers.'

The HHC is drawn from responses to the national Medical Training Survey, which was conducted in August and September 2022. In the latest survey, 21,857 DiTs responded Australia-wide, among which 1,568, or 7%, were from South Australia.

Of the South Australian respondents, 80% worked in hospital settings and two-thirds in metropolitan workplaces.

Between 43% and 74% of respondents at four major hospitals – the Royal Adelaide Hospital (RAH), Flinders Medical Centre (FMC), Lyell McEwin Hospital (LMH) and Women's and

Children's Hospital (WCH) – indicated they 'did not report because of concern for repercussions' and between 47% and 63% at the same hospitals 'did not report because nothing will be done'.

AMA(SA) President Dr John Williams said it appeared the fear of repercussions was justified, with senior clinicians by far the most often-mentioned perpetrators. At the WCH, being bullied by senior medical staff accounted for 83% of the reported cases, followed by QEH (57%), LMH (56%), RAH (51%) and FMC (47%).

Dr Williams said it was 'extremely disappointing' that the number of junior doctors reporting bullying by senior medical staff had increased since a similar survey of 2019 found between 13% (QEH) and 42.7% (RAH) of bullying was attributable to consultants.

He said issues of bullying, discrimination and harassment continue to affect junior doctors' capacity to deliver the best care to their patients.

Dr Williams said it was nearly four years since former President Dr Chris Moy drew 'a line in the sand' to stop bullying and similar behaviours during a Parliamentary Committee on Occupational Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation's Inquiry into Workplace Fatigue and Bullying in South Australia's Hospitals and Health Services.

AMA(SA) subsequently staged a Culture and Bullying Summit that called out these issues and their effect on doctors before an audience including then-Health Minister Stephen Wade, Chief Public Health Officer Professor Nicola Spurrier, senior SA Health and LHN representatives, health administrators, senior and junior clinicians, and medical students.

Dr Williams said the legislative reform triggered by the Summit, which Dr Moy helped develop and which made local health network (LHN) boards accountable for workplace safety, should have radically changed the mindsets and behaviours of senior administrators and clinicians.

'Yet we're still hearing that doctors are experiencing the same issues,' Dr Williams said.

Dr Cain said the survey showed junior doctors continue to report that:

- Workplace issues affect their wellbeing
- There are barriers to accessing study leave
- Work rosters prevent them fulfil training requirements necessary for their progression through their training
- They are concerned that workplace conditions will affect their ability to finish their fellowships or enter their chosen specialties
- They are not provided with adequate working and learning spaces.

'While the loss of accreditation of some rotations at the WCH have been discussed publicly in the media, the WCH is not an isolated case and all LHNs must start addressing their unique and shared issues as soon as possible,' Dr Cain said.

**For more information, please contact AMA(SA) Senior Policy, Media and Communications Adviser Karen Phillips) on 0402 103 451.**