

SUBMISSION

Thursday, 14 November 2024

AMA submission to the rapid targeted review of the use of the title 'oral surgeon'

The Australian Medical Association (AMA) opposes the use of the title 'oral surgeon' as it misleads and confuses the public. The title 'surgeon' should be further restricted so that it can only be accessed by medical practitioners who have obtained fellowship of a relevant specialist medical college. Changing the Health Practitioner National Law to reflect this will prevent further instances of confusion and any resulting consultations.

The AMA's position on the use of the title surgeon was made clear in our [submission to the Queensland Parliament on Protection of the Title "Surgeon" Bill](#). 'Surgeon' is a medical term and should be reserved for medical practitioners who have obtained Fellowship of an Australian Medical Council (AMC) accredited specialist medical college or equivalent, whose training program includes a surgical component relevant to their field of expertise. We remain frustrated the National Law was amended so the title 'surgeon' was only protected among medical practitioners. The simplest solution is therefore to amend Section 115A of the National Law to exclude all non-medical health practitioners from using this title.

Patients should not be misled by the term 'oral surgeon' into believing they are dealing with a practitioner who has formal surgical qualifications when they do not. These practitioners are not registered with the Medical Board of Australia, nor have they received specialised medical, or AMC accredited surgical training. The title is highly confusing, and it misleads the public and other health professionals due to the similarities in the title with oral and maxillofacial surgeons.

While there are close similarities in titles, 'oral surgeon' practitioners perform vastly different roles to oral and maxillofacial surgeons. Patients may think they are seeing an oral and maxillofacial surgeon when they are not. We are aware of instances where health services have shortened the names of departments so oral and maxillofacial surgeons work in a unit

called the 'oral surgery unit'. This may be due to administrative or technological nuances which only enable a certain number of characters to be input into job titles.

Preventing non-medical use of the title 'surgeon' would ensure there is no potential for misunderstanding. If there is no appetite to amend the National Law, removing the use of the title 'oral surgeon' would also prevent confusion in these instances.

There is also a review into the use of the title 'podiatric surgeon' being led by the Podiatry Board of Australia. There is broad agreement the use of the word 'surgeon' in the title of non-medical practitioners is confusing and it should not be used. We appreciate the efforts of the Podiatry Board to address this, and the intentions of this rapid review, but the issue remains open while the National Law does not prevent other health professions from using the title 'surgeon'. As such, we urge health ministers to make this small, sensible amendment to the National Law. We understand there are only 66 registered 'oral surgeons' using this title. As such, the impact is relatively minor.

Our issue is only with the use of the title 'surgeon'. We advise any title that replaces 'oral surgeon' must not imply specialised surgical training as this will continue to cause confusion.

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