

6 September, 2021

Media Release

SOLUTION TO IMPROVE COSMETIC SURGERY STANDARDS IN SENATE INQUIRY SUBMISSIONS

The peak body for cosmetic surgery and medicine in Australia, the Australasian College of Cosmetic Surgery and Medicine (ACCSM, College), proposes a new register of Cosmetic Surgeons and a competency-based system of accreditation for all medical practitioners who wish to undertake cosmetic/aesthetic surgery. A summary of its submissions to the Senate Inquiry into the Administration of registration and notifications by the AHPRA and related entities under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law is provided below. The submissions are available:

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/AHPRA/Submissions

The problem – a lottery for patients

The current system is a complete lottery for patients. At present, there is no nationally accredited and easily recognisable system for patients to know whether or not they are in safe hands when seeking a cosmetic surgical procedure, as any Australian medical practitioner may call themselves a ‘cosmetic surgeon’.

As a relatively new and expanding area of specialised practice, cosmetic medicine and surgery is not recognised by the Australian Medical Council (AMC). This means medical practice in this field falls outside of specialist training programs accredited by the AMC and provided by traditional medical and surgical colleges in public hospitals. Training is varied and not subject to quality controls. Such lack of formal training was the reason that the forerunner to the Australasian College of Cosmetic Surgery and Medicine was formed almost 30 years ago.

There are three types of practitioners who undertake cosmetic surgery in Australia in 2021:

- 1) ACCSM Fellows, who are highly trained in cosmetic surgery with two years of mandatory dedicated cosmetic surgery training, following 4-6 years of medical training and a further five years of post-graduate surgical experience.
- 2) Some plastic surgeons, who, the AMC has reported currently qualify with a ‘deficit’ in their aesthetic (cosmetic) surgery and a ‘gap in this area of practice’, a situation which has been unchanged for nearly twenty years.

3) Other medical practitioners with no specific cosmetic surgical training.

Patients have no way of knowing whether their surgeon is properly qualified and has undergone specific training in cosmetic surgery. Regrettably, there are numerous cases of Australians who have had inadequate cosmetic surgical outcomes, or even lost their lives, because their practitioner was not adequately trained or qualified in cosmetic surgery.

The solution – a positive framework with patient safety in mind

The College is calling for a competency-based National Accreditation Standard in cosmetic surgery. Any medical practitioner, including plastic surgeons, who wish to perform such surgery under the title 'cosmetic surgeon or aesthetic plastic surgeon' would have to achieve the benchmark Standard and undertake recertification.

AHPRA would maintain a Register of such practitioners to whom the title 'cosmetic surgeon or cosmetic/aesthetic plastic surgeon' would then be restricted, thereby protecting the public by practitioner regulation.

This would remove confusion for consumers, allowing them to identify competent, safe practitioners and also prevent any commercial monopoly. Competition between safe practitioners based on competence, price and service would benefit and protect patients by improving standards.

This is the right thing to do for patient safety and has been described by senior health officials as a 'no brainer'.

Market manipulation

Medical practitioners who seek to prevent such a competency-based solution may be seeking commercial advantage by attempting to manipulate the current regulatory reform process to eliminate competent professional competitors who are trained in cosmetic surgery. In short, not to protect patients but to protect and enhance their privileged incomes.

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About the Australasian College of Cosmetic Surgery & Medicine

Established as the Australian Association of Cosmetic Surgery in 1992 and succeeded by the Australasian College of Cosmetic Surgery in 1999, the Australasian College of Cosmetic Surgery & Medicine (ACCSM) is a not-for-profit, multi-disciplinary fellowship-based body of cosmetic surgeons, cosmetic physicians, plastic surgeons, general surgeons, maxillofacial surgeons, ear nose and throat surgeons, ophthalmologists and other doctors and health care practitioners who practice in cosmetic medicine and surgery. The primary goal of the ACCSM is to ensure the safe provision of cosmetic medical and cosmetic surgical procedures to the Australian community through the supply of appropriately trained and certified health care practitioners. The ACCSM is the only medical college which provides education and training leading to fellowship specifically in cosmetic medicine and surgery. Fellows of the College are medical doctors who have completed post-graduate education and training and demonstrated competency specifically in cosmetic medicine and surgery. To become an ACCSM Surgical Fellow, doctors must typically complete a minimum of 12 years of dedicated surgical education and training. To become an ACCSM Medical Fellow, doctors must typically complete a minimum of 7 years dedicated medical education and training. For additional information about the ACCSM, please visit: <http://www.accsm.org.au/>