

The Australasian College of Cosmetic Surgery and Medicine

Raising Standards, Protecting Patients

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Media release

Regulation on Cosmetic Surgery Needed

The national peak body for cosmetic surgery and medicine, the Australasian College of Cosmetic Surgery and Medicine (ACCSM, College), seeks changes to the regulation of medical practitioners performing cosmetic surgery in order to protect the thousands of Australians seeking cosmetic surgical procedures each year. By doing so, the ACCSM seeks to raise standards and provide better and safer outcomes for patients.

The need for such changes was highlighted once again by the airing of Channel 10's two-part Mirror Mirror documentary on 8-9 September 2021, which suggested the bulk of cosmetic surgery in Australia being performed by medical practitioners with no specific cosmetic surgical training, for example general practitioners. It also implied, incorrectly, that plastic surgeons are automatically trained in cosmetic surgery.

Whilst the ACCSM acknowledges there are some talented plastic surgeons in Australia, the Australian Medical Council (AMC), the independent national standards body for medical education and training, recently found that plastic surgeons trained by the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons had a 'deficit' in their experience of aesthetic surgery and qualify with 'a gap' in this area of practice.

Whilst the Channel 10 programs highlighted issues regarding body image dissatisfaction and its role in the rise of cosmetic surgery, they did not examine the rise in poor outcomes resulting from surgery performed by practitioners inadequately trained and experienced in cosmetic surgical procedures. Many patients undergo cosmetic surgery without knowing whether or not the surgeon they choose is appropriately trained.

Also omitted, yet published online, presenter Todd Sampson admitted that he underwent a surgical procedure of the eyelid by a plastic surgeon and said it was a horrific experience.

"Not knowing the details of what I would go through...it was a horrific experience," Sampson said. "I ended up under general anaesthetic and the stitches inverted and I had issues where I couldn't see for a week. It was a bit of a nightmare...I jumped in eye-first and it was nasty".

The ACCSM President Dr Patrick Tansley said there are currently three types of medical practitioners calling themselves ‘cosmetic surgeons’ (see list at page 3) .

“Any medical practitioner can currently call themselves a cosmetic surgeon, including general practitioners, plastic surgeons and Fellows of the Australasian College of Cosmetic Surgery and Medicine,” Dr Tansley said.

“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.

“ACCSM Fellows are highly trained in cosmetic surgery and are regularly called upon to correct botched procedures performed by untrained and inexperienced practitioners. They usually have the strongest credentials in the practice of cosmetic surgery, including 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. No other organisation provides this standard of cosmetic surgery training.”

Patient safety must come first

The ACCSM is calling for State and Federal Health Ministers, COAG Health Council, Regulators and other relevant stakeholders, to develop a competency-based National Accreditation Standard in cosmetic surgery to provide better and safer outcomes for patients.

“We are calling on the Australian Federal and State governments to provide a single accreditation process so that Australian patients can be assured their surgeon is properly trained in cosmetic surgery,” Dr Tansley said.

“This would ensure that all doctors, including specialist plastic surgeons, who call themselves cosmetic or aesthetic plastic surgeons would need to have achieved an independently assessed benchmark of relevant training, qualifications and experience specifically in cosmetic surgery. They would also be subject to ongoing recertification requirements.

“The ACCSM has also proposed an AHPRA-Register of all medical practitioners performing cosmetic surgery who have met and maintain the Standard. Only those on it would be able to use the title ‘cosmetic surgeon’ or ‘cosmetic or aesthetic plastic surgeon.’

“This would enable consumers to easily identify practitioners who are trained, accredited and safe to practice cosmetic surgery from those who are not. It would also ensure there is a mechanism to identify associated issues and a consistent approach for practitioners tackling the rise in Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD).”

BDD is present in approximately 2.3% of the Australian population, and can be high as 15-20% of patients who present for a cosmetic procedure. All ACCSM surgical and medical Fellows are trained to assess patients for this condition, through the use of validated

screening tools and where applicable, diagnose and form treatment plans using a multi-disciplinary approach in conjunction with GP colleagues, psychologists and psychiatrists.

Warning on Brazilian butt-lifts

The Channel 10 programs also included reference to Brazilian butt-lifts (BBLs). Such procedures aim to enhance the projection of the buttocks by removing fat from one area of the body and transferring it into the buttocks to give a larger, more rounded look.

The procedure is on the rise both here in Australia and abroad. However, on safety grounds, the ACCSM has repeatedly warned Australians not to undergo this procedure as worldwide, more than 40 patients have died as a result. Evidence shows that one in every 3,000 BBL results in a fatality due to fat embolism, when fat enters the bloodstream with potentially catastrophic effects.

“The College calls on all Australian cosmetic and plastic surgeons to put safety first and not perform this procedure” Dr Tansley said.

Types of doctors performing cosmetic surgery in Australia in 2021

1. Fellows of the Australasian College of Cosmetic Surgery and Medicine who have up to 12 years dedicated medical training, including two years mandatory cosmetic surgical training. This is arguably the finest standard of cosmetic surgical training in the country.
2. Plastic surgical Fellows of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons who may, or may not, have any specific cosmetic surgical training. This was confirmed as recently as December 2017 by the specialist regulator, the Australian Medical Council, which found specialist plastic surgeons in Australia have ‘a deficit’ in their experience of aesthetic surgery and qualify with ‘a gap in this area of practice’.
3. Other fully registered medical practitioners with no specific cosmetic surgical training.

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About the Australasian College of Cosmetic Surgery & Medicine

Established as 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/>