

MEDIA STATEMENT

Friday 22 April 2022

UNIFORM NATIONAL STANDARDS NEEDED TO PROTECT PATIENTS IN MULTI-BILLION DOLLAR COSMETIC SURGERY INDUSTRY

MORE than 100,000 doctors in Australia¹ currently have the right to call themselves a cosmetic surgeon, without necessarily undergoing specific training to be competent and safe, putting millions of patients at risk.

It is estimated half a million Australians spend at least \$1 billion per year on cosmetic surgery, which is more per capita than in the United States. Many practitioners are taking advantage of this rapid growth, resulting in damaging and dangerous consequences. Astonishingly however, cosmetic surgery is not recognised as a medical speciality and accordingly, has no associated specific standards.

The Australasian College of Cosmetic Surgery and Medicine (ACCSM) is calling for urgent regulatory change to protect patients undergoing cosmetic surgery.

ACCSM President, Dr Patrick Tansley, has welcomed a review by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) and in particular, its inclusion of an **Endorsement** model solution for the area of practice of cosmetic surgery.

“Modern cosmetic surgery has only emerged in the last 40-50 years. Under current legislation, it is not able to be recognised as a speciality and accordingly has no associated protected title. The ACCSM has therefore called for the introduction of **Endorsement** of **ALL** medical practitioners wishing to practice cosmetic surgery. This approach would incorporate an agreed National Accreditation Standard, not only requiring core surgical competence, but also additional training, qualifications, competency and recertification specific to cosmetic surgery, for all doctors who perform it. No such standard currently exists” Dr Tansley said.

“All such Endorsed medical practitioners would have to meet and then maintain the Standard. By means of a related public Register, independently administered by AHPRA, patients would be able to identify easily those doctors who **are** trained, competent and safe to perform cosmetic surgery from those who are not.

The Endorsement approach would protect patients and is a solution that is readily available under section 98 of National Law – created to accommodate new areas of practice not fitting the criteria of new medical specialties, yet still requiring protective regulatory restriction. This reflects precisely the situation regarding cosmetic surgery.”

¹ <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/doctors-and-specialists/in-australia#:~:text=and%20specialist%20organisations-,Medical%20doctor%20and%20specialist%20workforce,more%20than%2036%2C000%20were%20specialists>

Endorsement would offer a pragmatic and effective way of accrediting ALL medical practitioners who wish to practise cosmetic surgery and would ensure safety for patients by provision of clarity and transparency in relation to relevant qualifications and competence.”

A 2021 survey of ACCS Fellows found 94% had been consulted by patients to address operative problems following cosmetic surgery undertaken by Australian qualified specialist plastic surgeons and 87% had undertaken revisional surgery on such patients following cosmetic surgery by Australian qualified specialist plastic surgeons, some of whom may never have trained in cosmetic procedures.(1)

Such data supports the need for a competency-based National Accreditation Standard and Endorsement Model specific to cosmetic surgery. It is also consistent with the wishes of Australians, 97% of whom in an earlier survey believed that doctors should have to pass an exam and get a ‘licence’ in cosmetic surgery before being allowed to practise it. Further, 98% believed that patients have the right to know if the doctor performing their cosmetic surgery procedure is trained specifically in cosmetic surgery.(2)

“The ACCSM believes there should be an independent register of Australian medical practitioners who have undergone the necessary training in cosmetic surgery, administered independently by AHPRA, not by the industry itself” Dr Tansley said.

In its **2017 Report**, the AMC variously stated in relation to cosmetic surgery that plastic surgical trainees have a ‘*lack of training*’, a ‘*deficit*’ in experience available and qualify with ‘*a gap in this area of practice*’.(3) In its latest **2021 Report** the AMC remains conspicuously silent about any robust dedicated cosmetic surgical training and experience for plastic surgical trainees.(4)

In **April 2022** the Australian Senate Inquiry reported that ‘*Over a three year period (1 July 2018 to 30 June 2021), AHPRA received 16 226 notifications about medical practitioners, of which AHPRA identified 313 notifications relating to 183 practitioners that concerned “botched surgeries” or a surgical outcome with a complication or resulting in injury. Of those notifications that specifically concerned cosmetic procedures, 52 per cent related to medical practitioners who are registered in a surgical specialty (mostly specialist plastic surgeons)*’(5, 6).

Nevertheless, AMC-accredited specialist plastic surgical groups are opposed to an independent Register of medical practitioners of cosmetic surgery (7, 8), that would include plastic surgeons, in context of what one such group described as the ‘*booming and lucrative cosmetic surgery market*’ (9).

Table 1: Types of registered medical practitioners performing cosmetic surgery in Australia

Group	Type of practitioner performing cosmetic surgery	Approximate no. in Australia	Details of training
1	Cosmetic surgeon (ACCSM Fellow)	50	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bachelor of Medicine & Surgery 4-6 years • 5 years postgraduate training/experience, including minimum 3 years accredited surgical training in non-cosmetic posts. • Additional mandatory 2 years ACCS dedicated cosmetic surgical training & examination
2	Plastic surgeon (RACS Fellow)	500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bachelor of Medicine & Surgery 4-6 years • 3 years basic training/experience • 5 years postgraduate reconstructive surgical training/experience • Optional 6 months dedicated cosmetic surgical training • May or may not obtain further <i>voluntary</i> cosmetic surgical training after qualification as a plastic surgeon • FRACS plastic surgery qualification determined by the Australian Medical Council (the specialist regulator) to have '<i>a deficit</i>' in experience of aesthetic surgery and '<i>a gap in this area of practice</i>'
3	Cosmetic surgeon (non-ACCS Fellow) Examples: RACGP general practitioner, non-RACGP general practitioner, other such as FRACS non-plastic surgery.	Unknown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bachelor of Medicine & Surgery 4-6 years • Variable postgraduate training/experience • May or may not have basic or advanced generalised surgical training/experience. • Zero dedicated cosmetic surgical training & examination leading to Fellowship in Australia

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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. For additional information about the ACCSM, please visit: <http://www.accsm.org.au/>

References

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6. Senate Community Affairs References Committee Report into Administration of registration and notifications by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency and related entities under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law. 1 April 2022.

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8. Australasian Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons. Register of cosmetic surgery practitioners 27 October 2021 [Available from: <https://aestheticplasticsurgeons.org.au/media/register-of-cosmetic-surgery-practitioners/>].
9. Maddison M. Plea to ban 'charlatan surgeons'. The Australian. 29 December 2020.