

THE ENDORSEMENT MODEL WILL PROTECT COSMETIC SURGERY PATIENTS | Q&A FACT SHEET

1. What is the difference between a cosmetic surgeon and a plastic surgeon?

- **A cosmetic surgeon who is an ACCSM Surgical Fellow - FACCSM (Surg) has received specific training in cosmetic surgery.** The Australasian College of Cosmetic Surgery and Medicine (ACCSM) provides the only dedicated cosmetic surgery training program in Australia. ACCSM Fellows are registered medical practitioners who have had at least three years of accredited surgical training and at least five years of post-graduate experience. They undergo two years of advanced training in cosmetic surgery and examination before they are awarded a surgical fellowship.
- ‘Cosmetic surgeons’ who do not have FACCSM (Surg) may have no training in surgery or cosmetic surgery at all.
- **A plastic surgeon has trained in the plastic and reconstructive surgical training program of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS).** Cosmetic surgery is *an optional* component of this training program, in which the **Australian Medical Council (AMC)** has found does not provide adequate training for cosmetic surgery and that surgeons graduate with a ‘deficit’ in this area of practice.

2. Why is cosmetic surgery not a surgical specialty in Australia?

- There are nine surgical specialties in Australia (cardiothoracic, general, neuro, orthopaedic, otolaryngology head and neck, pediatric, plastic and reconstructive, urology, and vascular). The Australian Medical Council (AMC) accredits training programs in these specialties.
- **Cosmetic surgery is not considered a surgical specialty because these surgeries do not address a “burden of disease”, which is the main criteria for recognised medical specialties. In other words, there is no ‘functional need’ or medical indication for cosmetic surgical procedures. However, there is a consumer demand for it – which means patients need to be protected by robust regulation and oversight.**
- The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) argues that their plastic and reconstructive surgery specialty encompasses cosmetic surgery. The **AMC has reported multiple times that the plastic and reconstructive specialty does not adequately cover cosmetic surgery**, and indeed – that is not the point nor focus of their specialty. To protect the public, all doctors who perform cosmetic surgery must have cosmetic surgery procedure-specific training. For example, the only hands-on training program in liposuction (lipoplasty) available in Australia is through ACCSM.

3. What is the endorsement model for cosmetic surgery?

- The endorsement model will, for the first time, establish rigorous training and standards in **cosmetic surgery** that must be met by practitioners in Australia if they want to be endorsed by the regulator to perform such surgery. If they meet the stringent criteria, practitioners will be endorsed by the Medical Board as having an “extended scope of practice in cosmetic surgery”. These endorsed practitioners then appear on a public register. This better informs patients about the qualifications of their cosmetic surgeon.
- **The Area of Practice Endorsement is a regulatory mechanism which allows the public to identify doctors trained in cosmetic surgery.** Put simply, it is a way to partly close the regulatory loophole (since there is no cosmetic surgery specialty) and protect patients.
- An [independent review](#) into cosmetic surgery made **16 recommendations to improve patient safety. The endorsement model was one of them.** The Australia Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) accepted all recommendations and adopted the model after Health Ministers approved its implementation.

4. Why is an endorsement model necessary?

- Because patients need to be protected. And because cosmetic surgery is not regarded a surgical specialty, as explained in [Question 2](#), this regulatory loophole has been exploited by unqualified and unscrupulous operators. These operators have violated the first principle of medicine to ‘do no harm’. **The only goal of the endorsement model is patient safety.** ACCSM has advocated for better patient protection and safety [for many years](#) and supports independent regulation of cosmetic surgeons.

5. Will the endorsement model endorse practitioners who are not appropriately trained to perform cosmetic surgery?

- No. Quite the opposite. For the first time in Australia, the endorsement model will implement rigorous standards for surgical training that will need to be met by practitioners to receive endorsement. This will set apart doctors who have completed the high-level surgical training expected by the Australian public.
- However, it does not restrict the scope of practice of any doctor, which is not the aim of AHPRA or the Medical Board. **Just as National Health Law allows specialist doctors to be recognised through Title Protection, Endorsement allows the public to identify which doctors have an approved qualification in cosmetic surgery.**
- This means specialist surgeons, including plastic and reconstructive surgeons who want to be recognised as having an extended scope of practice to include cosmetic surgery, would also have to apply for endorsement.

6. Will the endorsement model become law?

- **The endorsement model is already part of National Health Law under section 98.** It is a readily available mechanism, and can be implemented quickly, to protect consumers and cosmetic surgery patients.

7. Why is there opposition to the endorsement model?

- The Medical Board of Australia (MBA) and Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA)'s [independent review](#) found there were **no** universal minimum standards for education, training, or standards for cosmetic surgery in Australia. Through the endorsement model, APHRA and the MBA can form and implement these standards to better regulate the industry and improve patient safety.
- Some plastic and reconstructive surgeons and their societies believe their specialty training program includes comprehensive training in cosmetic surgery, despite the contrary reports from the Australian Medical Council (AMC). They believe the new cosmetic surgery standards prescribed by the AMC are “a lesser standard” compared to that of surgical specialist training provided by RACS. **However, the standards are unique, specific, and exclusive to cosmetic surgery. They are new and being implemented for the first time and are the only AMC standards for the practice of cosmetic surgery in Australia. Therefore, these high standards cannot and should not be compared to the standards set for other forms of surgery, including that of nine surgical specialties.**

8. What is the highest medical body in Australia?

- **The highest regulatory body for medicine in Australia is the Medical Board of Australia (MBA).** The MBA oversees the practice and regulates all medical practitioners. The MBA commissions the Australian Medical Council (AMC), an independent body to ensure that “standards of education, training, and assessment of the medical profession promote and protect the health of the Australian community”. For many years, the AMC has done so by setting and assessing the standards of every level of medical practice, from accrediting medical schools to accrediting training programs of specialist medical colleges.
- **Not all qualified surgeons in Australia are members of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS).** For example, a patient who needs eye surgery will see an ophthalmic surgeon, whose training is facilitated by the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists (RANZCO). The ophthalmologist may or may not be a RACS Fellow.

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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/>

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