



Royal Australasian

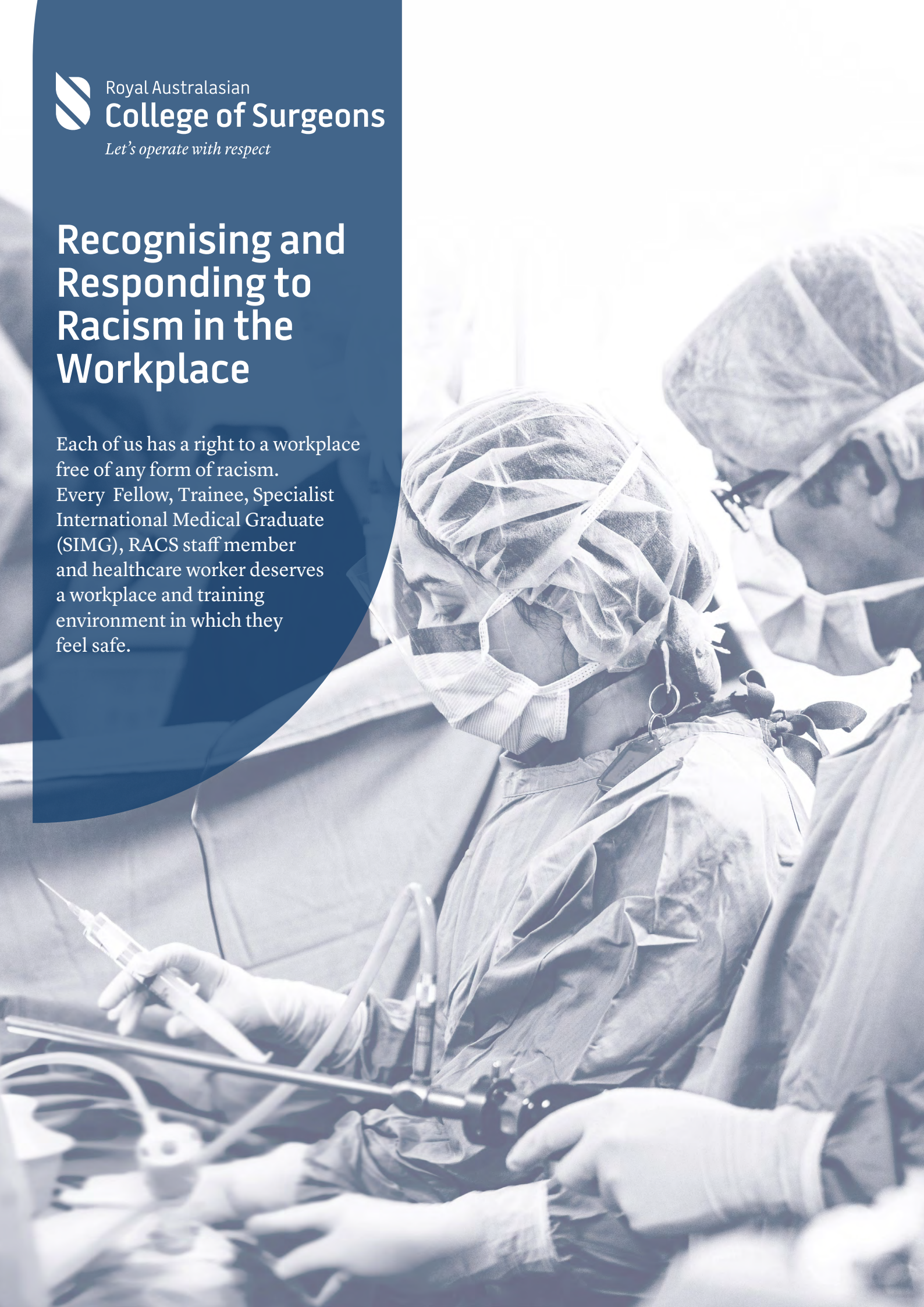
College of Surgeons

Let's operate with respect

Recognising and Responding to Racism in the Workplace

Each of us has a right to a workplace free of any form of racism.

Every Fellow, Trainee, Specialist International Medical Graduate (SIMG), RACS staff member and healthcare worker deserves a workplace and training environment in which they feel safe.



Background

Eliminating racism is central to a culture of respect, but it won't happen without effort. Together, we are building a culture in which all surgeons and people involved with RACS feel they belong, are valued in the RACS community and can contribute fully and safely to reach their potential.

This document outlines RACS' position on racism. Our College is striving to better support our Fellows, Trainees, SIMGs and staff to recognise, respond to and address racism in surgery and in healthcare more broadly. Participants in the 2021 independent evaluation of our work to build respect and improve patient safety in surgery told us it was time to act on racism.

What is racism?

Racism takes many forms, all of which are harmful. Racism is the belief that different races have distinct personalities, behaviours and/or morals that distinguish them as superior or inferior to another. Acting on racist thoughts leads to both conscious and unconscious discrimination. Its impact varies with everyone who experiences it. Its effects have been described as distinct and not felt equally.

In our workplaces, racism can relate directly or indirectly to nationality, country of origin or citizenship, ethnicity, social origin, immigrant or refugee status, colour, language or accent. Racism can also relate to a person's cultural and religious beliefs and is further compounded by additional markers of social difference, including indigeneity, disability, gender, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic status. It is widespread amongst all races and cultures. It doesn't have to be deliberate to cause harm.

Racial harassment is unwanted, unwelcomed or uninvited behaviour that makes a person feel humiliated, intimidated, excluded or offended on the basis of race. It can involve single or repeated incidents. Intent and motive are irrelevant – what matters is the effect of the behaviour on another person.

Racism:

- is unacceptable behaviour that prevents equity, fair treatment, dignity and respect
- adapts and changes and can adversely affect different individuals and communities in different ways
- is the consequence when systems, processes, actions, attitudes and intolerances create inequitable opportunities and outcomes for people based on their race.

“When I say my name is Rasheed, there is an assumption of incompetence by patients and by colleagues until they ascertain differently. I have to prove my competence, which is not necessarily true for others with a different name”.

Name changed

- can be internalised, interpersonal, institutional and/or systemic/structural.
- occurs when individual or institutional prejudice discriminates, harasses, vilifies, excludes and/ or limits the rights of others.

Racism in surgery

It will take time, effort and a shared commitment to identify and eliminate racism in surgery. RACS has a clear policy: Racism is never acceptable. But a policy needs action to have meaning and we all have a role to play. Racism is not someone else's problem to solve. Addressing it is our shared responsibility.

As a profession and as individuals, we need to address interpersonal racism and the unacceptable behaviour of individuals in our workplaces.

We also have a shared responsibility to recognise and dismantle the structures and processes that perpetuate racial stereotypes, prejudice and inequity. Racism can be difficult to recognise and is embedded in many of the systems and structures that privilege particular groups, at others' expense.

In surgical practice, you might come across racism when you:

- hear a colleague make an inappropriate comment about the race of a peer or other health care worker or patient in the theatre, staff room or meeting room
- see colleagues excluded because of their race
- hear a racial slur made about a patient or visiting family members
- hear a racial slur made by a patient or visiting family members
- recognise that different processes or requirements may have been imposed on another person because of their cultural background
- read a colleague's social media posts which disrespectfully reference nationality and social origin
- recognise when race-related assumptions have affected another person's decision making
- recognise when practices or processes are treating people more or less favourably because of their race.

There are many possible responses to racism, whether you witness it, experience it, or are challenged to reflect on your experience with it. You can contact

one of RACS surgical advisors, who are experienced surgeons on the RACS staff, with skills and experience to manage these issues. They can also connect you to other resources you think might be better placed to support you. Other responses are outlined in the information that follows.

It's personal: When racism affects you

People who experience racism report a wide range of impacts, that can include feeling upset, excluded, humiliated, rendered invisible, undervalued, and shaken to their core.

Individually, we may experience racism or be adversely affected by racial comments or stereotypes.

It can be daunting to raise concerns or make a formal complaint.

These are some of the things you can do if you are personally experiencing interpersonal, institutional and/or systemic racism:

- if you feel safe to do so, talk to the person responsible for the behaviour, sharing feedback about the impact of their words or actions, and asking them to reflect on and to stop the behaviour
- make a complaint to your employer, because every employer has a legal duty to ensure the workplace is free from racism and related victimisation
- seek support from your peer network, mentor, colleagues or senior surgeon you trust
- contact one of RACS' surgical advisors to talk over the issues outlined in this document
- access psychological support from the RACS Support Program provided by Converge International or an alternative employee assistance program
- be familiar with your organisation's policies on race related discrimination and harassment and document the events or behaviour you experienced
- make a complaint to RACS, by contacting the feedback and complaints team
- gather information from credible online sources and external agencies in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand that deal with racism. The list below might be helpful. You can call them for information or to lodge a complaint.

“We need a shared understanding that racism is widespread among all races and ages and cultures. We need to get away from racism as being something directed to a minority and see it as a ubiquitous two way street”.

Name withheld

When racism involves patients

Fellows, Trainees and SIMGs report racism from patients or their families. If you are a surgical supervisor, you represent your employer and have a duty of care to your Trainee.

When you see or hear racism or racial harassment from patients or their family towards you or a Trainee, there are important ways of indicating their behaviour is not acceptable, including:

- speaking up at the time, pointing out to the patient or their family that their comments or behaviour are disrespectful, hurtful and unacceptable and
- advising your employer, which is responsible for ensuring safety and employment rights are not compromised.

Standing up to racism

We won't eliminate racism in healthcare without effort. For a start, we can all make sure we are familiar with race-related concepts and language. We can all speak up when we see racism. It is part of what we all need to do to build a culture of respect.

When you see racism affecting other people, you can:

- listen actively to the experiences of others, putting yourself in their shoes
- help a person experiencing racial harassment and support them to take their own action and find information that may assist them, if they ask you for support
- speak up and call out racism, because it will take all of us to build a culture of respect. We can all speak up for the culture we want to be part of.
- learn more about how to talk about racism, in a way that recognises the nuances of the issues and is not polarising. There are useful links and suggestions at end of this document and on our website.
- encourage a colleague or Trainee experiencing racism to contact one of RACS surgical advisors
- raise examples of institutional and/or systemic racism with your employer.
- If you witnessed the racism yourself, you can also:

- talk to the person responsible for the behaviour, sharing feedback about the consequences for another person of their words or actions, asking them to reflect on it and encouraging them to stop
- raise the specific issue with your employer or a relevant senior manager
- raise the specific issue with a member of your human resources team.

Supporting someone who has experienced racism

Being on the receiving end of racism can be disempowering and lonely. There may be times when you are best placed to provide support for people affected by racism by sharing some options for action they may want to consider:

- helping them to work out what they might say to the person responsible for the behaviour, actions or comments of concern
- encouraging them to contact RACS' surgical advisors
- referring them to workplace policies and procedures, and to credible information posted online by government and external agencies in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand that deal with racism (listed below)
- suggesting they report the problem and directing them to information about making a complaint
- offering to be a 'support person' throughout a complaint process
- connecting them to a source of support, including the RACS Support Program or other employee assistance program.

If someone has raised concerns about your behaviour with you

It is possible that someone will raise a concern about racism, or the effect of your words or actions on another person with you. This can be uncomfortable and challenging. You can:

- listen to their concerns and reflect on the issues raised, putting yourself in their shoes

“When colleagues refer to hospital administrators as Nazis, it strikes a very painful chord as I reflect on the price paid by my family members at the hands of this group”. Name withheld

- talk through some options for how best you might respond with a RACS surgical advisor, to help you understand the impact you may have had, opportunities to learn and how you may best repair the injury or damage caused
- make a genuine apology
- take steps to learn more about the complexities and nuance of racism and its consequences (see the list of resources below).

What is anti-racism?

Being anti-racist means working to dismantle the structures and to challenge the mindsets that uphold and perpetuate racism. It is about speaking up when you recognise racism and helping to build a culture of respect, to eliminate racism.

Being anti-racist is a choice and involves taking action against racial inequities. It requires us to be aware of ourselves, what forms our worldview, and how this might differ from others. It means being self-reflective and making consistent, equitable choices. It involves recognising that our systems and structures result in inequities, particularly in health outcomes. It includes taking personal responsibility for reflecting, educating ourselves and speaking up.

How to be antiracist is different if you are white or a person of colour. For white people, it involves acknowledging and understanding privilege, working to change internalised racism and becoming an ally in the fight against racism. For people of colour, it involves recognising how race and racism have been internalised.

Racism is embedded in the systems and structures that help cause health inequities. We all have the opportunity to bring anti-racism to all areas of our services, in delivery of surgical services as well as in research, audit and other areas of our work.

There are useful links at the end of this document.

Building a culture of inclusion and respect: What RACS is doing

Across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, legislation prohibiting discrimination, harassment, vilification and disharmony on the basis of race has been in place for decades. Over time, community understanding of the adverse and destructive consequences of

racism has evolved. A more sophisticated understanding of human rights is leading to institutionalised and systemic racism being more readily identified and challenged.

RACS Code of Conduct and RACS Equal Opportunity and Acceptable Workplace Behaviour Policy, outlines our position on unacceptable behaviour such as Discrimination, Bullying and Sexual Harassment. This applies to all Fellows, Trainees, SIMGs and RACS staff.

Highlighting RACS' position on racism is a response to calls for RACS to better support our Fellows, Trainees, SIMGs and staff to recognise, respond to, and address racism in the practice of surgery and in healthcare more broadly. Doing so will positively impact our surgical community, our healthcare colleagues and our patients and their families.

RACS is proud of its work to build a culture of respect, which includes striving to identify and eliminate racism. Everyone deserves to experience inclusivity, equity, belonging and to be treated with dignity. Our programs aim to inform people about their rights and responsibilities and support them to behave professionally.

How RACS can support you

RACS surgical advisors

RACS has equipped its dedicated team of surgical advisors (Executive Director Surgical Affairs – Australia, Surgical Advisors – Aotearoa New Zealand) to discuss the information provided in this guidance. They are available to speak to all Fellows, Trainees, and SIMGS and can do so confidentially.

Phone: 1800 892 491 in Australia and 0800 787 470 in Aotearoa New Zealand

Email: feedback@surgeons.org

RACS Operating with Respect course

The Operating with Respect (OWR) course provides you with practical strategies and skills to respond appropriately to unacceptable behaviour. The OWR course is evidence-based and designed to help all surgeons create a safe, respectful workplace culture that positively impacts Trainee learning and ultimately improves surgical care.

Further information: <https://www.surgeons.org/Education/professional-development/all-professional-development-activities/operating-with-respect-owr-course>

RACS Support Program

If you are feeling anxious or depressed it is important to speak to someone. The RACS Support Program is a confidential service available at no charge to all Fellows, Trainees and SIMGs and their families.

RACS Support Program is provided by Converge International:

Australia: 1300 687 327

Aotearoa New Zealand: 0800 666 367

RACS Feedback and Complaints Team

RACS is focused on supporting professionalism in surgery and making sure that all concerns and complaints are handled by the agency best placed to manage them. If you are concerned about the behaviour of a RACS Fellow, Trainee or SIMG, we can tell you about your options and help you work out what to do next.

Phone: 1800 892 491 in Australia and 0800 787 470 in New Zealand

Email: complaints@surgeons.org

Further information: <https://www.surgeons.org/about-racs/Feedback-and-complaints/Our-process#RACS%20approach>

RACS staff

RACS staff are encouraged to raise any issues they are concerned about with their manager or a member of the People and Culture Team. They can also access independent confidential advice and support through the RACS Employee Assistance Program, provided by Converge International.

RACS Support Program is provided by Converge International:

Australia: 1300 687 327

Aotearoa New Zealand: 0800 666 367

Additional useful contacts

There are places to go if you would like more support or information on racism.

External agencies

It might be useful to make an inquiry or a complaint to an external agency.

Australian federal, state and territorial legislation varies, as does Aotearoa New Zealand legislation. Options for seeking more information are listed below.

Australia

Australian Human Rights Commission

Phone: 1300 656 419

Website: www.humanrights.gov.au

Australian Capital Territory (ACT)

ACT Human Rights Commission: 02 6205 2222

New South Wales (NSW)

Anti-Discrimination Board NSW: 137 788

Northern Territory

Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Commission: 1800 813 846

Queensland

Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland: 1300 130 670

South Australia

Equal Opportunity Commission South Australia: 1800 188 163

Tasmania

Equal Opportunity Tasmania: 1300 305 062

Victoria

Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission: 1300 891 848

Western Australia

Equal Opportunity Commission Western Australia: 1800 198 149

Aotearoa New Zealand

Aotearoa New Zealand Human Rights Commission / Te Kāhui Tika Tangata:

Phone: 0800 496 877

Website: www.hrc.co.nz

Worksafe / Mahi Haumarū, Aotearoa New Zealand

Phone: 0800 030 040

Website: www.worksafe.govt.nz/worksafe

Ministry of Justice / Te Tāhū o te Ture, Aotearoa New Zealand

Phone 09 6252440

Website: www.belong.org.nz/our-why

Aotearoa New Zealand Department of Justice

Website:

<https://www.justice.govt.nz/justice-sector-policy/key-initiatives/national-action-plan-against-racism>