



Patron: H.R.H. The Prince of Wales

# ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

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## OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

Professor Michael Grigg

Letter to the Editor

### **Response to the Age anonymous letter from the President of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons**

Dear Colleague,

Thank you for having the courage to write your letter, albeit anonymously, outlining your substantial concerns about the health sector and the practice of surgery.

The College of Surgeons believes that bullying and harassment are far too prevalent in society and in the health sector. Indeed as I stated yesterday, any sexual harassment is abhorrent. In communication to you and your fellow surgeons yesterday, I described bullying and harassment as a scourge of the modern workplace. It occurs between and within multiple professions and at multiple levels of seniority. It needs to be addressed, not just as a professional body such as the College, but by employers like Hospitals and Departments of Health and most importantly by all of us as individuals. As individuals we can and must stand up to these issues so that the culture of the workplace will change.

The examples you provide in your letter are horrifying and they need to be condemned. It is this type of behaviour that is truly insulting. When I used the word insulting yesterday, I was strongly condemning any recommendation that any female surgeon past, present or future, should suffer sexual harassment in silence. This statement is a travesty. As a profession we need to be so much better than this.

However, your letter highlights the importance of continuing to change the culture and continuing to improve our standards. Much has been done and continues to be done. Bullying and harassment is being addressed. However, the cultural change must be embraced and far more fully in the workplace and the health sector. The increased participation in the surgical workforce by female Trainees is fantastic. They must be encouraged, they must feel safe, they must be able to speak up and they must be respected.

The College has addressed and continues to address issues of bullying and harassment. It must do more to ensure these changes have impact and endurance in the workplace. The changes also need to be embraced by Hospitals and other employers.

As you say, there is still so much to do. I ask that you do work with your colleagues and that you do work with the College to ensure that we triumph over this scourge of the workplace.

Yours sincerely

**Professor Michael Grigg**

President

10 March 2015