
ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

MEDIA STATEMENT



Response from the President – Professor David Watters

Friday 2 October 2015

The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) has publicly and unreservedly apologised to everyone who has suffered from discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment (DBSH) in the practice of surgery.

We recognise that this is a serious issue and that we have not done enough in the past and that is why we established the [Expert Advisory Group](#) (EAG).

We have learnt through the EAG's independent review that RACS needs to do much more and in particular to be more involved with reviews of bad behaviour in the work place and that it cannot rely solely on investigations undertaken in the workplace by hospitals.

This is much bigger than just one individual case and is prevalent throughout the health sector and across every hospital – it must be addressed comprehensively at multiple levels.

RACS has accepted the EAG recommendations in full and is preparing a comprehensive action plan to be published in November and we will be held to account against it.

We recognise that it has taken a long time to deal with this as seriously as we are now committed to doing.

In the past we saw these as largely workplace issues and the EAG has advised that in future action must be taken by employers and the College together.

When the concerns reported in today's Fairfax newspapers were raised in 2008 the College developed educational material such as the [Guidelines to Bullying and Harassment: Recognition, Avoidance and Management](#) that was distributed to all Fellows, Trainees and International Medical Graduates shortly after and then redistributed in an updated version a few years later.

RACS also created courses such as [Training in Professional Skills \(TIPS\)](#) that is now run regularly around Australia and New Zealand.

The College also jointly organised international meetings around [Professionalism](#).

This has also been a major feature of RACS scientific meetings across Australia and New Zealand as well as the College's educator courses such as the [Masters of Surgical Educators](#) run in conjunction with the University of Melbourne.

These educational programs however were not enough to substantially challenge and change the culture within the health sector. This was made clear when discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment was highlighted earlier this year and RACS has publicly acknowledged this.

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