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AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND  
COLLEGE OF ANAESTHETISTS

ABN 82 055 042 852

*Advancing anaesthesia,  
improving patient care*

July 20, 2015

Professor David Watters, President  
Hon. Rob Knowles, Chair Expert Advisory Group  
c/- Royal Australasian College of Surgeons  
College of Surgeons' Gardens  
250-290 Spring Street  
East Melbourne VIC 3002 Australia

Email: [eag@surgeons.org](mailto:eag@surgeons.org)

Dear Professor Watters and Mr Knowles

**Re: RACS Expert Advisory Group on discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment – Issues paper**

Thank you for your invitation to make a submission in relation to the above issues paper. At the outset the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA) would like to commend the efforts of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons for seeking to address issues of discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment and inviting comment from numerous perspectives. As reflected in the issues paper these issues arise in many forums. ANZCA has distributed this issues paper to our Fellows and trainees and encouraged those who wish to, to provide input directly to the EAG. Below we provide a response from the perspective of our College rather than a summary of individual experiences from our Fellows and trainees.

ANZCA, including the Faculty of Pain Medicine, is committed to high standards of clinical practice in the fields of anaesthesia and pain medicine. As the education and training body responsible for the postgraduate training programs of anaesthesia and pain medicine for Australia, New Zealand and parts of Asia, we believe in ongoing continuous improvement and strive to ensure our programs represent best practice and contribute to a high quality health system.

#### **Issues paper**

ANZCA strongly supports the issues paper's stance that there is no place for discrimination, bullying or sexual harassment in any modern workplace and that this is consistent with our College's mission "to serve the community by fostering safety and high quality patient care in anaesthesia, perioperative medicine and pain medicine". The College wishes to reiterate that these problems require a culture of zero tolerance. Specialists have a responsibility to take a stand against such behaviour if they witness it and support junior staff in any discipline. It is the only way this unacceptable behaviour will ever be stamped out.

From a clinical perspective, ANZCA feels that the EAG has done an excellent job identifying many of the issues faced by Fellows and trainees in relation to discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment and that these are well summarised in the issues paper. The causes of discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment are diverse and while in some cases may be linked, are likely to originate for a number of reasons. While included as part of the issues paper and background briefing, a greater focus on clearly identifying the causes of these types of behaviour would be useful to support future behaviour change.

Anaesthesia trainees are selected, employed and work in hospitals, while the training program is managed by the College. The College policy on bullying, discrimination and harassment (for Fellows and trainees acting on behalf of the College or undertaking College functions) acknowledges at the outset that Fellows and trainees are expected to comply with the relevant hospital policies. The College also provides clear pathways for the handling of complaints in the feedback management policy and whistleblowers policy (<http://www.anzca.edu.au/resources/corporate-policies>). The ANZCA training agreement is signed annually by trainees and draws attention to both the trainee's responsibilities and resources available. In addition, the ANZCA orientation ("part zero") course is being adapted to include additional information on discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment.

The issues paper highlights that while policies regarding discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment have been adopted on a wide scale and (in Australia) formal mandatory reporting obligations have been introduced, this has not necessarily led to reform in the workplace culture that allows this type of behaviour to persist. A strong focus on understanding and correcting the disconnect between the policies and their adoption is critical to engendering change. A focus on why the systems are not being used, and how they can be reconfigured from a potential user's perspective should be a priority. A good example is providing graded escalation pathways, such as starting with anonymous reports and progressing to formal direct interventions, to increase the likelihood that the issues will be raised.

### **Existing resources**

The Welfare of Anaesthetists Special Interest Group (SIG) (<http://www.anzca.edu.au/fellows/special-interest-groups/welfare-of-anaesthetists/introduction.html>) has provided support for anaesthetists in dealing with issues including discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment since 1995. The Welfare of Anaesthetists SIG is a tripartite body governed by the College, Australian Society of Anaesthetists and New Zealand Society of Anaesthetists. The group was formed to raise awareness of the many personal and professional issues which can adversely affect the physical and emotional well-being of anaesthetists at all stages of their careers. The group provides a forum for colleagues to discuss difficult issues through meetings, newsletters and developing and maintaining a series of resource documents on topics such as sexual misconduct, depression and anxiety, mentors, bullying and harassment and mandatory reporting. The Welfare of Anaesthetists SIG supports educational courses that teach collaboration and stress self-management.

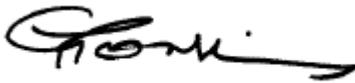
The ANZCA Code of Professional Conduct (<http://www.anzca.edu.au/resources/professional-documents/pdfs/Code-of-Conduct.pdf>) provides guidelines for the professional behaviour expected of Fellows of the College. In addition, the College has sought to formally acknowledge the many roles in practice a specialist anaesthetist performs including being a medical expert, communicator, collaborator, manager, health advocate, scholar and professional. These roles provide a framework as part of the College curriculum as well as the foundation for the College's recently launched Supporting Anaesthetists' Professionalism and Performance: A guide for clinicians (<http://www.anzca.edu.au/resources/professional-documents/pdfs/Supporting%20Anaesthetists%20Professionalism%20and%20Performance%20FINAL%2020150428.pdf>). The guide outlines expected patterns of behaviour, defined by a series of

positive and negative behavioural markers to provide specialists with a tool for self assessment to encourage reflection of their own practice.

Addressing systemic issues such as discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment, will never be straightforward. The expert advisory group's current approach of collecting data and trying to define the breadth of existing problems has already provided helpful insights for organisations and individuals concerned with these issues. Formally acknowledging these issues is an important first step towards making shifts in the culture that has enabled them to subsist.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into this consultation. We look forward to the outcomes of the current consultation. Should you require any further information, please contact Jonathon Kruger, General Manager, Policy, via email [jkruger@anzca.edu.au](mailto:jkruger@anzca.edu.au) or telephone +61 3 8517 5341.

Kind Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Genevieve', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Dr Genevieve Goulding  
President