



New regulatory response to allegations of unprofessional conduct in Cosmetic Surgery

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In response to recent media reports of serious unprofessional conduct in cosmetic surgery, the health practitioner regulator and Health Ministers have announced significant changes.

Reports in the media demonstrated highly inappropriate conduct by some medical practitioners, a lack of skills in treatment of patients, a failure to provide adequate information regarding the success and risks of treatment and high costs charged to patients. The appropriateness of some advertising of cosmetic surgery was also questioned.

In response the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (**Ahpra**) and the Medical Board of Australia (**MBA**) commissioned an "Independent Review of the Regulation of Medical Practitioners who perform Cosmetic Surgery". Ahpra and the MBA recognised that there were serious patient safety concerns, poor care and outcomes, as well as concerns regarding the advertising and promotion of cosmetic surgery in an inappropriate manner.

Health Ministers also expressed concern and supported reforms in this growing and expensive area of health care.

The MBA announced new Guidelines for doctors who perform cosmetic surgery, which will cover practices including breast augmentation, facelifts and liposuction, as well as non-surgical cosmetic procedures such as injectables, lifts and laser treatments.

Patients seeking cosmetic surgery will need a referral from their GP. This will ensure that patients have access to a GP who can provide broad advice and review, and consider the individual medical history of the patient and perform a role as "gatekeeper" before cosmetic surgery is finally considered by a patient.

The Guidelines issued by the MBA also include increased standards for premises at which cosmetic surgery is undertaken, and improved requirements for patient assessment by medical practitioners, to ensure that any recommendations for cosmetic surgery are appropriate.

New Guidelines will also apply to advertising of Cosmetic Surgery, including through social media. Already medical practitioners cannot advertise in a way that is false, misleading or deceptive, offering discounts

People who can help



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inappropriately, using testimonials or giving an unreasonable expectation of the outcomes from treatment.

Advertising must also now include clear information about risks, only use videos and images responsibly, not in a way that sexualises or includes gratuitous nudity, and the use of negative body language is to be prohibited.

Health Ministers also announced that there would be a new registration standard for cosmetic surgery as an endorsement to registration. This would assist patients to know who has been appropriately educated, trained and experienced to perform cosmetic surgery in a safe manner. The endorsement will appear as part of the public register maintained by Ahpra and indicate that a doctor has met the new cosmetic surgery standards to be set by the MBA and the Australian Medical Council.

The new Accreditation Standards for cosmetic surgery are being developed, and may be released shortly. This affects how a practitioner will obtain the endorsement, through appropriate education, training and experience.

It is noted that plastic surgeons, who can also undertake cosmetic surgery, are already appropriately qualified and accredited to do so, have achieved recognition through the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS), after undertaking a number of years of practice and training. The requirements of this endorsement are not intended to replicate those high standards of the RACS, but provide a more limited pathway to specifically approve endorsement for procedures for cosmetic surgery, but hopefully with a similarly appropriate and rigorous program of education, training and experience. No doubt there will be a significant review of the draft endorsement standards once they are finalised.

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