RACGP
Royal Australian College of General Practitioners

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12 May 2023

Committee Secretary
Health and Environment Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000
Via email: hec@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary

RE: Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (Surgeons) Amendment Bill 2023

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission in response to the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (Surgeons) Amendment Bill 2023 (the Bill).

The RACGP is Australia's largest professional general practice organisation, representing over 46,000 members working in or toward a career in general practice.

RACGP position on the Bill

The RACGP is currently unable to support the proposed legislation until certain matters have been resolved.

We acknowledge that the legislation has tried to address the concerns of the RACGP in Clause 4 s 115A (5d) which states: *a medical practitioner holding specialist registration in another recognised specialty in the medical profession with the word "surgeon" in a specialist title for the specialty.*

This section of the Bill contains the following ambiguities:

- The term 'recognised specialty' is clear, but does not clarify the process of recognition of the term 'surgeon' with respect to the specific recognised specialty.
- Specifically, clarification is sought on which authority defines and recognises the relevant surgical training, and this needs to be reflected in the legislation.

As recognised in the explanatory notes, currently GP surgeons provide surgical services in rural and remote areas. We believe that this group of GP surgeons and proceduralists need to be clearly recognised in this legislation with relevant Medical Board of Australia recognised training.

Background

Last year the RACGP provided a submission in response to the Consultation Regulation Impact Statement *Use of the title 'surgeon' by medical practitioners in the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law.* The RACGP supported changing the National Law to restrict the title 'surgeon' to specialist medical practitioners with significant surgical training, while opposing any changes that would exclude GPs from being able to use the title.

The number of GPs who have gained their surgical skills through fellowship with either the RACGP or the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) is small, but their role is often vital to providing essential services in rural communities who do not have access to a full surgical team.

At a minimum, we would expect any practitioner using the title 'surgeon' to:

- have a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) or equivalent recognised qualification leading to medical registration
- be a member of a postgraduate college
- have a predominantly surgical practice and have completed relevant training.

The RACGP supports introducing changes that will increase patient safety and care. In previous responses on this issue, we have advocated for increased public education and increased regulation around cosmetic surgery, including seeking clarity in the use of titles. The potential harms associated with cosmetic surgery are related to the degree to which the competencies held by the practitioner match the scope of practice, which needs to be regulated through training.

We refer the Committee to our response to question 6.4 on page 5 of our previous submission on this topic, which asked *Do you support restricting the title 'surgeon' under the National Law?* Of particular note are the following points:

- As a principle the RACGP does not support efforts to diminish the role or skills of GP specialists as a mechanism to regulate unqualified practitioners.
- The use of the title 'surgeon' should be dependent on certified completion of approved training and demonstrated required competencies. It should not be restricted only to those who undertake RACS training.
- Clinicians with primary specialisations of dermatology and general practice who undertake additional training that is sufficient to hold the required competencies should be able to use the title 'surgeon'.
- The term 'GP-Surgeon' should be allowed and protected for those in the RACGP or Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) who have completed the relevant training.
    - Fellows of the Advanced Rural General Practice (FARGP) qualification who have completed the Surgery – Advanced Rural Skills Training (ARST) should be eligible to use the title 'surgeon', as should practitioners with the FACRRM qualification who have completed the Surgery Advanced Skills Training (AST).

If you have any questions or comments regarding this submission, please contact Ms Samantha Smorgon, Acting National Manager – Funding and Health System Reform, on (03) 8699 0566 or via samantha.smorgon@racgp.org.au.

Yours sincerely

Dr Nicole Higgins
President