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Executive Officer, Medical
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Dear Executive Officer

Thank you for giving the Australian Medical Association (AMA) the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft revised guidelines *Sexual Boundaries in the Doctor-Patient Relationship*.

We offer the following comments:

Section 1.2 Good communication

In the second dot point, we recommend changing the word 'question' to 'ask questions'. In this way, the dot point would be amended as follows:

- *informing patients of the nature of, and need for, all aspects of their clinical management, including examination and investigations, and giving them adequate opportunity to ~~question~~ ask questions or refuse intervention and treatment.*

There is a distinct difference in tone between 'questioning' an intervention and 'asking questions' about an intervention. To question an intervention sounds like the patient should query the validity of the doctor's recommendation while asking questions about an intervention implies the patient should raise any concerns or seek clarity about the recommended intervention and discuss them with the doctor.

By amending 'question' to 'ask questions', the sentence is also consistent with the first dot point under 'Section 7 Physical examinations' which states:

- *explaining to the patient why the examination is necessary, what it involves and providing an opportunity for them to ask questions or to refuse the examination.*

Section 2 Why breaching sexual boundaries is unethical and harmful

In the opening paragraph of this section, we recommend including the words 'emotionally' and 'psychologically' to the end of the first sentence so it would be amended as follows:

*Doctors are expected to act in their patient's best interests and not use their position of power and trust to exploit patients physically, ~~or~~ sexually, **emotionally or psychologically.***

It is important to recognise that patients can be exploited emotionally and psychologically (in addition to physically and sexually) through breaching sexual boundaries. Emotional and psychological exploitation (and harm) is appropriately recognised throughout the guidelines and thus should be included in this opening paragraph.

Section 8 Social media

We suggest expanding this section to include digital communication. Digital communication includes text messages and emails and, like social media, are platforms by which doctors and patients can communicate (and thus where sexual boundaries can potentially be crossed).

We suggest amending the title to read 'Section 8 Social media and digital communication'. It would be beneficial to add in a small definition of digital communication which captures communication such as text messaging and email. Wherever the term 'social media' is used in this section it could be expanded to 'social medial and digital communication'.

If you have any questions regarding the AMA's submission, please contact the AMA's Ethics Manager, Dr Kate Stockhausen, at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. We look forward to seeing the guidelines when they are finalised.

Sincerely



Dr Michael Gannon
President