

## **Submission Regarding: Public consultation on draft revised code of conduct, Good medical practice: A code of conduct for doctors in Australia.**

I wish to address in particular the paragraph:

*“The boundary between a doctor’s personal and public profile can be blurred. As a doctor, you need to acknowledge and consider the effect of your comments and actions outside work, including online...If making public comment, you should acknowledge the profession’s generally accepted views and indicate when your personal opinion differs. Behaviour which could undermine community trust in the profession is at odds with good medical practice and may be considered unprofessional”.*

A problem with the wording of the draft code is the inherent limitation of free speech. The minority will not be able to challenge the views of the alleged majority which is, in itself, undemocratic, but also opposed to the scientific method in which hypotheses are formulated, argued and tested.

Adherence to the code extends beyond arguments about science to the realms of personal ethics and religious beliefs. Indeed, the whole purpose of the paragraph is likely to be focussed on societal values. The new code would prevent doctors from speaking plainly on matters that challenge their conscience.

Contrary to the suggestion by AHPRA that ‘community trust’ will be ensured by limitation of comment, it could be argued ‘community trust’ will be reduced by the knowledge that the medical profession will only speak with one voice because of the silencing power of AHPRA.

How does AHPRA know what comprises ‘generally accepted views’ on any particular subject? Vocal minorities can seem to be more representative than they are. For example, the official Nursing organisation recently declared itself in favour of euthanasia but a survey of nurses involved in providing palliative care found their majority was not in favour of euthanasia.

How can AHPRA judge the nebulous concept of ‘community trust’? Who will comprise the ‘judging committee’ of doctors deemed unprofessional? And can AHPRA ensure the small committee of its judges will not be influenced subjectively by pressure groups.