

I write in regards to the proposed Code of Conduct. I am a medical practitioner a rural GP, and am concerned about several of the points which may result in dilemmas for doctors.

Section 2.1-is effectively threatening doctors to abstain from voicing an opinion publicly –are we not members of a free demographic society? Don't we as members of society have a constitutional right to have a voice, to have a say on how our country is run, on policy, ethics and social change? Are we following in China's footsteps where many of the highly educated people who potentially may have challenged Mao's regime, were removed from office, placed in prison or otherwise effectively silenced. Doctors see firsthand the health effects of certain behaviours, we are highly intelligent, highly educated, responsible and caring individuals and we therefore have a valuable voice in public debate. We should not be told how to think and act in our private lives. The fourth paragraph of this section regarding the above should be dismissed.

In regards to section 4.8 –“ Culturally safe” implies that doctors are not permitted to question a cultural practice even if there is strong evidence that this cultural practice is contributing to or causing illness in an individual. In the same vein, “Respectful practice” can be taken to mean agreeing with behaviours that fly in the face of sound, scientifically based medical practice. These two statements are obstructive to medical practitioners who genuinely wish to act in the best interests of the patient-do we ignore obesity because, “ All of our family members are big people” ; do we not question alcohol abuse in a community where this is rife and an accepted cultural practice, do we not address contraception, and sexual practices in a population that has a high incidence of unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. Education and discussion about these issues is part of our job and these statements will potentially result in unnecessary vilification legal cases just because someone has been offended, for example, if we say that they are overweight or drink too much or if encourage someone to think about their sexual practices.

In regards to section 4.8.4- there is no protection here for doctor's who wish to act in accordance with their conscience, for example, in regards to issues such as referring for abortion and for gender reassignment therapy. This subsection should be dismissed entirely.

Section 3.4.3 I disagree with the wording “ on medically irrelevant grounds” -all of these factors listed are relevant medically when considering the holistic health of a person. This should be removed from the code