

Public Consultation on Good Medical Practice.

Dear members of the Medical Board of Australia.

I write to express my view on the proposed 'Code of Conduct' for good medical practice in Australia. Of particular concern is the proposed requirement for doctors to '*accept cultural beliefs and practices*' that are opposed to professionally qualified medical practice.

Referring to the proposed Code, I trust I can assume that point 1.1 '*there are no new standards*' means that good medical practice will remain unfettered by non-medical issues, such as the social and cultural proclivities of patients, that would prevent doctors from providing best medical care.

Doctors in Australia are highly qualified and skilled, professional medical practitioners. According to the preamble in the Proposed Code of Conduct, their role is '*to protect and promote the health of individuals and community*', '*care for the unwell and seeking to keep people well*' (1.5), '*give priority to clinical need and effectiveness of proposed treatment*'(2.4.4)

In their training, doctors undertake to provide, to the best of their ability, medical care for their patients. If the proposed Code of Conduct forces doctors to accept non-medical practices with which they disagree on medical grounds, that part of the Code is in direct opposition to that for which it purports to stand. Further, to propose that '*serious or repeated failure to keep these standards may have consequences for the doctor's medical registration*' (1.2) is to deliberately flout the appropriate, independent integrity of our medical professionals. Such a move is an insult to the profession, and would seriously compromise health care in this nation.

There seems to be some contradiction within the Proposed Code of Conduct. Point 2.4.6 affirms the right of doctors '*not to participate in treatments to which they conscientiously object*'. Apart from being an essential right of doctors, that right is a basic human right and we would be derelict if we allow anything to supplant it in anyone. Point 2.4.7 rightly affirms the responsibility of *doctors not to deny patients access to medical care...but it is also correct in... recognizing that doctors are free to decline to personally provide or participate in that care.*

Having *knowledge of, respect for, and cultural sensitivity towards the cultural needs of patients* (3.7.1) is necessary an acceptable. Placing that above professional medical care is foolishness. If it means we are to allow female genital mutilation, physical, psychological, emotional violence by husbands towards their wives and children, for example, we are not providing best health care for our patients or our community.

Point 1.1 of the Proposed Code rightly asserts that alternative standards '*cannot replace the insight and professional judgement of good doctors*'. That brief assertion alone should be sufficient to dismiss any notion that cultural issues should compromise professional medical care.

I urge the Board to act to protect the excellent current standards of conduct for medical practitioners, and remove from the Proposed Code of Conduct anything that would force doctors to be subject to conditions preventing them from providing best medical practice.

Sincerely,

John White, [REDACTED]

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