

From: Elizabeth (Beth) Thomas
To: [medboardconsultation](#)
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Public consultation on Good medical practice
Date: Friday, 3 August 2018 9:29:17 AM

Dear Medical Board,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the current revision of the Code of Conduct for Medical Practitioners. I agree that it is important for doctors to uphold the profession as a whole, including in our personal and social media comments.

However, I am very concerned about what has happened recently with Ms Angela Williams, who was dismissed from her position with Cricket Australia for her social media campaign in favour of abortion rights. The situation was summarised by her lawyer as "She expressed a political opinion about an issue that was being debated in Parliament and in the public in Tasmania, and she lost her job because of it."

I am concerned that the current wording of the Code of Conduct leaves doctors open to similar consequences.

Quoted from the Draft Code: "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."

This appears to imply that making social media comment could lead to being deregistered? Especially if the views expressed differ from "generally accepted views" - which could be very difficult to define in the rapidly moving landscape of social media controversy!

Just to name a few issues, this could easily be made to cover commentary on abortion, euthanasia, children in detention, legalisation of cannabis, gender reassignment, asylum seekers and immigration policy or even (who knows?) the Electronic Medical Record or the actions of AHPRA itself.

How could an individual doctor defend such a charge, once the wording became part of the official Medical Board Code of Conduct? If a doctor were to report on conditions in Nauru, and the government of the day were to complain to AHPRA to have the doctor reprimanded for "unprofessional conduct" it could be very costly and difficult to defend. How could an individual doctor prove that their comment was "not unprofessional"?

Yet doctors have always had a voice in controversial issues of the day. It was not very long ago that Marriage Equality was controversial and publicly debated on social media. It would be a shame to silence doctors' voices in essential social debate, or even to create fear for professional consequences if commentary were deemed to be different from "generally accepted views". It is only views that are different from what is generally accepted that can create change at all!

Dr John Snow expressed views and took action in ways which differed from "generally accepted views" - not despite being a doctor, but precisely because he was a doctor and saw his social duty to take action. At the time he was strongly disagreed with by the medical profession in general, as well as the government of the day.

We need to learn from the past, not repeat it. Public comment should never be grounds for an unprofessional conduct charge.

Yours sincerely,

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