

Friday, 17 August 2018

To the Medical Board of Australia,

I would like to give feedback on your draft revised Code of Conduct. I argue that the draft content in Section 2.1 may have a deleterious effect on medical research and doctor's mental health by restricting free speech.

The draft guideline section states, " If making public comment, you should acknowledge the profession's generally accepted views and indicate when your personal opinion differs. "

It appears that this guideline applies to all social media posts on all topics. If this is correct, I think this is beyond the scope of what the Medical Board should be regulating as doctors are entitled to their own personal views on social, political and other matters. The Board should not be getting involved in these matters. Regulating these opinions will cause unnecessary mental stress for doctors who already have enough workplace stress. To have one's livelihood threatened because you may or may not agree with euthanasia for example (and be willing to discuss it on Facebook) is an unacceptable use of the Board's regulatory powers and will result in many doctors being unable to express themselves in public and thus have reduced quality of life.

If this is not correct, this wording should be changed to clarify that it only pertains to medical issues under comment.

If this wording is then changed to reflect this more limited scope; specifically, that comment on medical issues "should reflect the profession's generally accepted views", I would like the Board to consider:

- a) How will we know what the generally accepted view is? (Are there any published and/or peer reviewed standards that we can adhere to?)
- b) Even if there are these standards, is it not the motivation of research and researchers to reveal new and different views on medical matters so we may improve healthcare and patient outcomes?

I worry that this guideline will silence voices of dissenting and novel opinion and regress our medical understanding and excellence in this country when we should be innovating and trying to achieve best practice.

To counter with the argument, "It will be ok, you just have to state the profession's common view first" is intimidating, stifling of research and free speech, and will be onerous on the Board to police.

I urge you instead to consider codifying a statement that the Medical Board SUPPORTS a doctor's right to free speech. This position is more closely aligned with the interests of medical research, doctor's mental health, and our commitment to human rights and freedom.

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