

Draft supplementary guidelines on cosmetic medical and surgical procedures for *Good Medical Practice: A code of conduct for doctors in Australia*



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Introduction

Women's Health Victoria is a statewide women's health promotion, information and advocacy service. We are a non government organisation with most of our funding coming from various parts of the Victorian Department of Health. We work with health professionals and policy makers to influence and inform health policy and service delivery for women.

Our work at Women's Health Victoria is underpinned by a social model of health. We are committed to reducing inequities in health which arise from the social, economic and environmental determinants of health. These determinants are experienced differently by women and men. By incorporating a gendered approach to health promotion work that focuses on women, interventions to reduce inequality and improve health outcomes will be more effective and equitable.

Women's Health Victoria's vision is for a society that takes a proactive approach to health and wellbeing, is empowering and respectful of women and girls and takes into account the diversity of their life circumstances.

Women's Health Victoria's ways of working are guided by four principles:

- We work from a feminist framework that incorporates a rights based approach.
- We acknowledge the critical importance of an understanding of all of the determinants of health and of illness to achieving better health outcomes.
- We understand that the complexities involved in achieving better health outcomes for women require well-considered, forward thinking, multi-faceted and sustainable solutions.
- We commit to 'doing our work well'; we understand that trust and credibility result from transparent and accountable behaviours.

Women's Health Victoria welcomes the introduction of supplementary guidelines on cosmetic medical and surgical procedures, and recognises the unique area of practice which requires regulation beyond *Good Medical Practice*.

1. Providing good care

1.1 Assessment

In exploring the reasons given by patients seeking surgery and their expectations, assessment by medical practitioners should also include provision of information regarding the healthy and natural range of diversity in body appearance. For example, women seeking female genital cosmetic surgeries such as labioplasty should be made aware that images rated M15+ are subject to the Australian Classification Guidelines, and that the labia minora are digitally removed or minimised in unrestricted women's and pornographic magazines. Assessment practices should include provision of information including unedited images of vulvas.

Recommendation:

Assessment should include provision of information regarding the healthy and natural range of diversity in body appearance.

1.2 Mental health issues

Women's Health Victoria welcomes the inclusion of mandated referral to a general practitioner or qualified health professional for review when there are indications that the person requesting surgery has self-esteem or mental health issues.

1.3 Consent and the cooling-off period

The draft supplementary guidelines state the following:

- 'Informed written consent should be obtained at a pre-procedure consultation within a *reasonable time period* before the day of the procedure and reconfirmed on the day of the procedure' [emphasis added]; and
- 'A cooling-off period between the initial consult and performance of the procedure is *encouraged*' [emphasis added].

While Women's Health Victoria welcomes the inclusion of these requirements, more prescriptive language is required so that doctors are clear about what a reasonable time period entails and to mandate, rather than encourage, their adherence to the guidelines. We therefore recommend that a mandatory cooling-off period of fourteen (14) days is required from the time of the initial consult, and that informed written consent should be required at least seven (7) days prior to the procedure and is reconfirmed on the day of the procedure.

Recommendation:

Women's Health Victoria recommends that a mandatory cooling-off period of fourteen (14) days is required from the time of the initial consult, and that informed written consent should be required at least seven (7) days prior to the procedure and is reconfirmed on the day of the procedure.

2. Working with patients

2.1 Informed consent

The draft supplementary guidelines state that the person seeking surgery should be provided with written information regarding:

- 'The risks and possible complications associated with the surgery/procedure'; and
- 'Information about your qualifications and experience'.

Although these are necessary inclusions to ensure that patients are adequately informed regarding the procedures or surgeries they are seeking, additional information regarding risks, complications, and the medical professional's experience would provide a more complete picture and ensure that informed consent is achieved.

The requirements detailed in relation to informed consent in the draft supplementary guidelines should therefore be expanded to include the following additional requirements *in italics*:

- Include the risks and possible complications associated with the surgery/procedure, *including their likelihood*.
- Include information about your qualifications and experience *with respect to the procedure or surgery in question*.

Recommendation:

The requirements detailed in relation to informed consent in the draft supplementary guidelines should be expanded to include the following additional requirements *in italics*:

- **Include the risks and possible complications associated with the surgery/procedure, *including their likelihood*.**
- **Include information about your qualifications and experience *with respect to the procedure or surgery in question*.**