

Urgent action needed to unmask cosmetic ‘surgery’

TUESDAY 26 OCTOBER 2021

The latest expose of the controversial practices of one of Australia’s most widely known cosmetic “surgeons” highlights the need for urgent reforms to ensure patient safety is effectively protected, the Consumers Health Forum says.

“The *4 Corners* program last night detailed a litany of unresolved patient complaints and irregular practices yet national and state regulators, including the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency, appear unable to take effective action to stop these shocking activities,” the CEO of the Consumers Health Forum, Leanne Wells said.

“The regulation of this uncontrolled area of medical practice --- likened in the program to ‘the Wild West’ --- is marked by a range of flaws, from a lack of clarity allowing the use of the title surgeon by non-specialists --- to an absence of rigorous accreditation that is routine in other branches of medicine.

“We saw instance after instance where patient safety and health outcomes were put at risk. The distress and loss of productivity for many of these patients is profound. Patients were poorly advised and also experienced unnecessary out of pocket costs in restorative surgery as a result.

Contact: Mark Metherell, 0429 111 986

Consumers shaping health

“And more disturbingly, such surgical free-for-alls may be much more widely prevalent than many people realise, with one professor of surgery saying the case of the individual exposed last night “is the tip of the iceberg”.

“In any event it is deeply concerning that doctors can put up their shingle as a ‘cosmetic surgeon’ - they do not have the same depth of training as a plastic surgeon who does cosmetic related procedures.

“People see the word ‘surgeon’ and think they are suitably qualified and regulated in the same way as other providers.

“This is a challenging case of buyer beware. While there is a grave and urgent need for much better consumer information, this amounts to regulatory fail of some significant scale.

“It is surprising that APHRA is not more proactive, even if its regulatory powers are to some extent limited.

“National standards on safety and quality in health care advocate that patients are partners in care. Australia has a charter of health care rights that calls for patients to be treated with respect and dignity and to be supported to make informed decisions.

“In addition, all providers have – or should have – professional standards that bind them to a duty of care and to ensure they have a patient’s informed consent.

“There were none of these basic tenets of our health care system’s commitments to patient rights shown last night.

“It is also disturbing that it should take whistleblowers and journalists to expose this - the system should be set up to safeguard patient safety.

Contact: Mark Metherell, 0429 111 986

Consumers shaping health

“Women and, in some cases, men, sometimes pursue cosmetic surgery for very good reasons. For people who are obese, for example, a cosmetic procedure can be life-changing. However, they have the right to safe quality care in any setting they choose and must be given every opportunity to learn about the benefits and risks and make an informed decision”

“All the more reason for urgent action on this matter including stronger consumer education and tighter regulation in the form of standards and enforcement of those standards,” Ms Wells said.

Contact: Mark Metherell, 0429 111 986

Consumers shaping health