

PERSPECTIVE

ACEM President response: Mandatory misrepresentation

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Abstract

With the challenges of modern media, political agendas and the power of special interest and pressure groups, specialist medical colleges increasingly have a significant role to play in health advocacy, and to stand up for human rights.

Key words: *advocacy, member engagement, public health, social justice.*

I believe emergency medicine is about social justice, fairness and equality; we need to ensure those values permeate through everything we do as a specialty and a college.

We are living in a time of unprecedented change – our members and trainees work in resource stretched health systems undergoing significant transformations, in communities that are experiencing rapid technological and demographic developments and the role of organisations, businesses and government has evolved profoundly.

Emergency medicine as a specialty has evolved. Our traditional views of what FACEMs do and what we represent have broadened over the years, as we see FACEMs step outside of our traditional hunting ground, the public hospital ED, and impact and influence the public health agenda across Australia, New Zealand and internationally.

We support developing countries to build emergency medicine

programmes. We have FACEMs and trainees working in Medecins Sans Frontiers, advocating for safe injecting rooms, safe pill testing, bans on alcohol advertising at sporting events, and calling for the end to open speed limits in the Northern Territory. We have FACEMs working in private practice, in medical administration, and in leading roles in health systems and jurisdictions. We have grown – with over 2000 fellows and more than 2500 trainees.

It is a big expansion, and one we should be incredibly proud of. Being a member of our college means being a member of an organisation that has increasing reach and influence.

Advocating for our patients

The college is not immune to the change that is happening in the world, business and our communities, and with its growth increasingly is expected to play a broader and more active role in publicly debating health and other policy issues.

ACEM needs to speak out on a number of public health issues, particularly issues affecting the communities we work in. This is an important role of the college, as we are advocating for our patients, and our patients come from our communities. They come to us for our help and support, so we should offer our support for them in the issues that impact their physical health and mental well-being.

ACEM has spoken out on a number of health and social issues from access block to Indigenous recognition and gender diversity.

Our support of same sex marriage was stepping into a space we have not ventured into before. Our support recognised the positive link between improved mental health outcomes and legislative change for LGBTI people and their children. The issue more broadly was and will remain a pivotal juncture in Australia's history, and I am proud that our college supported this significant correction of social injustice.

We respect the fact that not everyone agrees with marriage equality, but the national plebiscite showed the majority of Australians do, and Federal Parliament endorsed this view by backing the historic social reform.

Accountability, transparency and consultation

In recent years, important work has been undertaken to update the college governance structure, ensuring the election of the President and more democratic processes for councils and committees. Members are elected to positions of office within the college to advance emergency medicine and serve the membership. As a result of these recent changes, we are now better positioned to respond to and embrace the diversity of opinion that exists within our membership.

It is worth noting that membership of the college is voluntary. There are many doctors working in EDs who are not fellows of the college. The college's training programme leads to the award of fellowship of the college. Completion of this programme confers eligibility for registration as a

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medical practitioner in the specialty of emergency medicine and use of the specialist title, *specialist emergency physician* by the Medical Board of Australia (MBA), as well as registration within *the vocational scope of emergency medicine* by the Medical Council of New Zealand (MCNZ).

Like any member-based organisation, engagement with members is key. ACEM has a strong record in this field – we call for feedback consistently and engage with members every day through formal consultations, forums, committees and events. The opportunity to get involved in the college and influence change has never been greater.

However, we recognise we can do more in this space and increase the level of sophistication – and use new technologies available to us – when listening to and talking with members. There are plans underway to offer members yet more engagement opportunities to help us ensure the highest standards in emergency medicine education and training are

maintained and to promote excellence in the delivery of emergency care to the community.

My mission to represent and support members

A critical part of what drives me in this role is upholding the values that guided our founding members in establishing the college – core values of public health, teamwork and health equity for the communities we serve.

Those values are now more relevant than ever, especially as we face a hugely more complex regulatory environment that rightly requires the college to tackle issues that impact on the physical and mental health of marginalised and vulnerable communities. The college's offering of cultural competency training, for example, is a requirement of the Australian Medical Council and the MCNZ.

The college recognises the need to deliver the services that meet – and where possible exceed – the expectations of its members and trainees, as

well as those of external stakeholders, such as accrediting and regulatory bodies.

I am committed to driving an agenda that positions our college as a leading influencer in health policy and system reform. This will require us to take a public stance from time-to-time and while we will never get 100% agreement on some of the college's positions, I'm in furious agreement about Voltaire's maxim – 'I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it'. That is, members' diverse views should absolutely be embraced and celebrated.

I, along with the rest of the ACEM Board, look forward to continuing our work on what's important – the operations of the organisation and the outcomes we can achieve for our members, our patients and the health profession more broadly.

Competing interests

None declared.