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Submission to AHPRA
Public consultation on Good medical practice

Thank you of the opportunity to make a submission regarding proposed changes to the Code of Conduct.

The proposal to mandate that doctors only discuss what patients or their families consider to be 'culturally relevant' is very concerning.

This would prevent doctors challenging many cultural practices which are harmful, such as female genital mutilation. It is worth noting that a 'drug culture' exists, as well as a culture of excessive alcohol consumption. All of these would be obliged to remain unchallenged, to the detriment of patients. It would also expose doctors to the risk of litigation, for failing to offer evidence based advice. No patient is forced to see any doctor, and those who do not want advice which is based on evidence are free to seek practitioners who share their beliefs.

The changes would force doctors to act contrary to their consciences and try to prevent them speaking against things which they believe to be wrong. If politically correct speech had been enforced in times past, those who spoke against slavery or in favour of votes for women would have been ruthlessly suppressed, and important and necessary social change would not have taken place.

Permitting the cultural norms and beliefs not only of our own culture, but also other cultures, to be challenged is the only way to ensure that society has an adequate chance to examine all our beliefs and practices, to prevent harmful or unjust practices becoming entrenched

It is very concerning that a body such as AHPRA, which is tasked with ensuring high standards of clinical practice are maintained should be considering coercing doctors to endorse substandard clinical practice.

It is also very concerning for AHPRA to be considering using the considerable power that it wields over health practitioners to violate freedom of speech, freedom of religion and freedom of conscience. It is even more concerning that this suppression of freedom of speech may be applied to doctors' comments outside their clinical setting. This seems to be happening already to some extent (as per the van Gend case) and will only increase if the Code of Conduct is changed.

The current Code of Conduct has resulted in Australia having one of the highest standards of health practice in the world. It would be a great shame if that were lost.

Margaret Colwell