

Wiser Healthcare submission to the Medical Board of Australia's Public Consultation Paper on the draft revised *Good medical practice: A Code of Conduct for doctors in Australia*

We support the Board's proposal to revise the code of conduct (Option 2).

Specifically addressing Q4: *What is missing?*

The code should include the risks to patients of overdiagnosis and overtreatment when doctors request, report and interpret screening and diagnostic tests.

Overdiagnosis and overtreatment are now widespread in healthcare.^{1 2 3} A national statement calling for action to address overdiagnosis and overtreatment has been endorsed by leading healthcare organisations including the Royal Australasian College of Physicians, Consumers Health Forum of Australia, Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Healthcare, Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists, Royal Australasian College of Surgeons and Cancer Council Australia. A full statement and list of endorsements is available here <http://wiserhealthcare.org.au/national-action-plan/>

Doctors have a critically important role in addressing overdiagnosis and overtreatment, and this role should be addressed in the revised Code of Conduct.⁴ Doctors have a responsibility to be aware of the growing evidence of overdiagnosis and overtreatment in healthcare, and a responsibility to ensure that they inform their patients about these risks.

A new sub-section should be added to **Section 3.2 Good patient care**

Ensuring they are aware of the risks of overdiagnosis when requesting, reporting and interpreting the results of screening and diagnostic tests

A new subsection should be added to **Section 3.3 Shared decision making**

Ensuring patients are aware of the risks of tests, including the risks of overdiagnosis and overtreatment, when considering their healthcare options

A new subsection should be added to **Section 4.5 Informed consent**

When requesting a screening or diagnostic test, advising the patient of the risks of overdiagnosis and subsequent overtreatment that may occur as a result of the test



Overdiagnosis and overtreatment not only cause harm to patients and their families, but also divert resources from addressing underdiagnosis and undertreatment.

A new subsection should be added to **Section 7.2 Wise use of healthcare resources**

Understanding that over-investigation of your patients can divert financial and human resources inappropriately in the health system, resulting in a risk of underdiagnosis and undertreatment to other patients, and waste of healthcare resources.

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References

¹ Hoffman JR, Cooper RJ. Overdiagnosis of disease: a modern epidemic. *Arch Intern Med* 2012;358:1123-4. doi:10.1001/archinternmed.2012.3319 pmid:22733387.

² Welch HG, Schwartz L, Woloshin S. *Overdiagnosed: Making People Sick in the Pursuit of Health*. Beacon Press, 2011.

³ Moynihan R, Doust J, Henry D. Preventing overdiagnosis: how to stop harming the healthy. *BMJ* 2012;358:e3502. doi:10.1136/bmj.e3502 pmid:22645185.

⁴ Pathirana T, Clark J, Moynihan R. Mapping the drivers of overdiagnosis to potential solutions. *BMJ* 2017;358:j3879