



Response to the AMA's article "Urgent need to tighten rules on use of 'surgeon' to protect public safety, warns AMA"

***By Dr Robert Hermann
President - Australasian College of Podiatric Surgeons***



A recent article by the Australian Medical Association (AMA) calling for the title "surgeon" to be reserved for practitioners of medical colleges in the interests of public safety is not supported by the evidence (1).

Although the AMA article was directed at cosmetic surgeons, it contains a veiled swipe at other surgical specialities, including podiatric surgery. The AMA's recent article is another example of culturally embedded medical dominance under the guise of this public safety rhetoric (2).

The title "surgeon" is not and should not be owned by a specific profession or organisation. Protection of the title "surgeon" is reasonable for healthcare providers who are regulated under the national scheme (Australian Health Practitioners Regulatory Authority- AHPRA). This is especially the case when such practitioners are duly and independently accredited for a specific surgical competence and individual surgeons must comply with effective and transparent clinical governance. The ACPS training program and clinical governance frameworks are consistent with the attributes just described.

Podiatric surgery is accredited under the same regulatory framework as all registered health practitioners in Australia. The title *podiatric surgeon* is appropriate and recognised under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (National Law). The process for ministerial approval to use the protected title *podiatric surgeon* was extensive and transparent. Furthermore, it is important to note the Australasian College of Podiatric Surgeons (ACPS) training program is the only hospital-based surgical training in Australia that has been accredited specifically for foot & ankle surgery.

For 43 years, the ACPS has provided efficient, cost effective and safe care for the Australian community. This commitment to fulfilling the College's values of *service, integrity, respect, compassion* and *collaboration* is met with continual public misinformation and negative criticism by some influential sectors within the medical profession.



Our safety and effectiveness are well documented as all our surgeons participate in a mandatory national clinical audit and peer review. ACPS surgeons capture all perioperative data including 28 days after surgery using the ACPS National Online Audit. Every case of podiatric foot and ankle surgery performed in hospital, day surgery centre or office setting nation-wide is captured. This data is published annually and available online (3).

In contrast, no such publicly available data exists for our orthopaedic colleagues. This very fact was cited by the Medicare Services Advisory Committee (MSAC) in its conclusion for assessing MBS item numbers for podiatric surgery, when in 2020 it stated, *“there remains a lack of directly comparable evidence for safety and effectiveness, albeit primarily because of the paucity of high-quality contemporary evidence for the safety and effectiveness of the same services delivered by orthopaedic surgeons”* (4).

Some groups who perceive themselves as competitors to podiatric surgeons have been reluctant to collaborate for the benefit of the public. This lack of cooperation has persisted despite invitations to do so in the past. It is important to realise this invitation by the ACPS remain open. In contrast, there are international examples of collaboration between vascular and podiatric surgeons that provide world leading diabetic foot and ankle management (5,6).



The ACPS will continue to advocate and provide accredited training, ensuring the public has choice and access to expert specialist foot and ankle surgery.

1. https://www.ama.com.au/media/urgent-need-tighten-rules-use-surgeon-protect-public-safety-warns-ama?fbclid=IwAR3g2HCIVf4NxLRzmnDet83b7trAVUvPVnMiDaQN6nSmWjy1D_SOm nW0sWw
2. *Australian Doctor* (23/3/2021). AOA SUBMISSION Consultation paper: Draft proposed professional capabilities and accreditation standards for podiatry and podiatric surgery.
3. <https://www.acps.edu.au/publications>
4. MSAC 1344.2 Public Summary Document, 2020: Assessment of foot and ankle services by podiatric surgeons (Resubmission)
5. https://www.omicsonline.org/editor-profile/Thomas_Roukis/
6. <https://providers.keckmedicine.org/provider/David+Armstrong%2C+PhD/526740>