

Media Release

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Fabricated “DIY” titles mislead patients

Australasian Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons (ASAPS) President, Dr Naveen Somia said **Channel Seven’s Sunday Night program (31 March)** again brought to our attention the devastating consequences that can happen when doctors are allowed to parade as surgeons, free to title themselves whatever they please.

“In this instance, it was the title ‘aesthetic or cosmetic surgeon’ that misled patients into believing that Dr Leslie Blackstock was a trained and accredited surgeon who had appropriate skills and expertise to perform breast augmentations,” Dr Somia said.

It was the promise of safe, low-cost breast augmentation that lured so many women to the no-frills front door of Dr Blackstock's Penrith practice.

The Sunday Night program revealed that during surgery, it was commonplace for Dr Blackstock to sit the ladies up and ask them if they were happy with the size of the implants. If they were non-responsive, Dr Blackstock would Facetime one of their loved ones for a second opinion.

“Once a patient is under the influence of an anaesthetic, their ability to provide informed consent is gone. So, to be propping a patient up and asking for her opinion if she is happy with the size of the breast implant is never appropriate. That decision should be made well in advance of the surgery taking place,” Dr Somia said.

Several of his patients reported that they could feel him cutting their skin during the surgery, they felt their skin being pulled apart, and they could sense when he was pushing and placing the breast implants inside of them. Two women featured in the story said their support people, one who was in the waiting room and the other in the car park could hear them screaming in pain.

Dr Somia said he could not believe that patients in Australia could experience this standard of surgical care.

The Guardian’s Melissa Davey writing under the headline “**Fake Plastic Surgeon performed breast implant on woman without anaesthetist**” on 4 April 2019, states that a NSW district court judge, Leonard Levy SC, found a patient was the victim of unprofessional and incompetent treatment by Dr Blackstock and awarded damages of \$204,607 and ordered Dr Blackstock to pay her legal costs.

In his judgment, Levy stated, “I find that if the plaintiff had been told by the defendant that he was going to provide the described treatment without having suitable qualifications, training and experience, it would have been most improbable that the plaintiff would have submitted herself to any such operation at the hands of the defendant.

Dr Somia said that currently in Australia, any medical practitioner can title themselves whatever they choose and perform procedures in clinics that are not subject to the same standards and regulations as accredited hospitals.

“This is in stark contrast to a Specialist Plastic Surgeon who has completed the Australian Medical Council (AMC) accredited training through the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS), the only accredited training program for surgeons in Australia and New Zealand. Fellows of this program are then allowed to register as a Specialist Plastic Surgeon with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA).

“You don't have to look far for evidence of how hard it is for patients to decipher between the real and fake surgeons. The Sunday Night program and the Guardian article are just the tips of the iceberg. Many media stories have aired in recent times showing patients genuinely believe that if their doctor

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is registered and has a convincing sounding title, such as 'cosmetic surgeon', then they are appropriately qualified and competent to perform the surgery.

"Unfortunately ordinary doctors with no specialist training are able to fabricate their own titles which can misrepresent their level of expertise adding to patient confusion resulting in uninformed choices, poor surgical outcomes and, in some cases, significant patient harm, Dr Somia said.

Dr Somia said the Government and AHPRA need to mandate that medical practitioners only use their AHPRA accredited title as signified by their registration status. This will inform the public if the surgeon is a real one or a pretend one.

"Otherwise, patients are at a complete loss to know if the self-titled surgeon has completed any surgical training, if the self-titled surgeon tried to achieve a FRACS but failed to meet the standards, or if the self-titled surgeon trained overseas but was unable to have his or her qualifications recognised by the Medical Board of Australia. Patients just don't know.

"Patient safety must be prioritised and not short-changed by the Health Ministers at the upcoming Council of Australian Governments meeting where the opportunity exists to review the National Law. We would implore the Ministers to vote unanimously in favour of stringent use of the APHRA accredited titling system, therefore banning misleading titles such as 'cosmetic surgeon' as this would help clear up the confusion currently faced by patients.

"If nothing is done now, patient safety will continue to be compromised well into the future" Dr Somia said.

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