

Response template for the public consultation on the proposed change to the protected title for the podiatry speciality of podiatric surgery

September 2024

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Your answer:

☐ Organisation

Name of organisation: [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Contact email: [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

☒ Myself

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

Question B

If you are completing this submission as an individual, are you:

☒ A registered health practitioner?

Profession: Podiatrist

☐ A member of the public?

☐ Other: [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Question C

Would you like your submission to be published?

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Your responses to the consultation questions

1. Do you agree with the proposal to change the protected title for the podiatry specialty of podiatric surgery to 'surgical podiatrist' to make it clear that the practitioner is a specialist podiatrist who performs surgery? Why or why not?

I do not agree with the proposal to change the protected title for podiatric surgery to "surgical podiatrist." The title "podiatric surgeon" is already well-established and clearly conveys that the practitioner is a specialist who performs surgery. Changing the title could introduce unnecessary confusion among the public and healthcare professionals by blurring the distinction between general podiatrists and those with advanced surgical qualifications.

Additionally, the term "podiatric surgeon" is widely recognized and reflects the level of expertise and training required to perform surgeries. A new title could undermine the established credibility and professional identity of podiatric surgeons. Maintaining the current terminology supports clarity, professional identity, and patient understanding of the specialized care they can expect from a podiatric surgeon.

2. Do you have an alternative suggestion for the protected title? If yes, how would your suggested title achieve the same result as 'surgical podiatrist' in providing greater clarity to consumers?

An alternative suggestion for the protected title could be "**Specialist Podiatric Surgeon**". This title retains the current terminology of "podiatric surgeon," which is already familiar to both the public and the healthcare community, while adding the term "specialist" to emphasize the advanced expertise and specialization required to perform surgery.

How it would achieve the same result as "surgical podiatrist":

- **Clarity:** The term "specialist" directly communicates that the practitioner has undergone additional training and holds advanced qualifications in surgery beyond general podiatry. This helps differentiate podiatric surgeons from general podiatrists, who may not have the specialized surgical training.
- **Recognition:** "Specialist Podiatric Surgeon" is more likely to be understood by consumers and healthcare professionals as a podiatrist with expert surgical skills, maintaining clarity about the scope of the practitioner's abilities.
- **Preservation of Professional Identity:** This alternative title builds on the existing professional identity and recognition of podiatric surgeons, reinforcing their role as specialized experts in the field. It avoids confusion that could arise from a new, unfamiliar title like "surgical podiatrist."

3. What are the potential impacts for consumers of the proposed change in title?

- ☐ **Confusion and Misinterpretation:** There may be some confusion among consumers who are not familiar with the difference between "podiatrist" and "surgical podiatrist." Some might assume that all podiatrists perform surgery, leading to misunderstandings about the qualifications and expertise required for specific procedures.
- ☐ **Fragmentation of the Field:** Introducing a separate title could lead to potential fragmentation in the podiatry field, with some consumers possibly viewing podiatric surgery as a separate profession, which could undermine the unity of the podiatry profession and make it harder for consumers to navigate the overall field of podiatric care.
- ☐ **Overemphasis on Surgery:** The title "surgical podiatrist" could give an impression that the practitioner is mainly focused on surgery, potentially downplaying their expertise in non-surgical podiatric treatments. This may cause some consumers to overlook the comprehensive care offered by podiatrists for conditions that don't require surgery.
- ☐ **Resistance to Change:** Consumers who are already familiar with the term "podiatric surgeon" might find the new title unnecessary or confusing, as it doesn't significantly alter their perception of the professional's role. The shift in terminology could lead to initial resistance from the public or cause difficulty in adapting to the new title.

4. What are the potential impacts, including potential costs, for podiatric surgeons of the proposed change in title?

- ☐ **Cost of Rebranding:** Podiatric surgeons would likely need to update marketing materials, professional credentials, websites, and other documentation to reflect the new title, incurring both time and financial costs.
- ☐ **Confusion with Existing Titles:** There may be confusion between the new "surgical podiatrist" title and existing titles like "podiatric surgeon," which could undermine the intended clarity and create challenges in distinguishing between different professional qualifications.
- ☐ **Training and Qualifications Perception:** The new title might result in questions from consumers or healthcare professionals regarding the specific qualifications or level of training of a "surgical podiatrist," which could lead to uncertainty about their expertise.
- ☐ **Potential Devaluation:** The term "surgical podiatrist" could inadvertently suggest that podiatric surgeons are more "specialized" than other podiatrists, which might create a hierarchy within the profession and make some feel their skill sets are undervalued.
- ☐ **Legal and Regulatory Implications:** There could be legal or regulatory challenges in transitioning to the new title, potentially leading to additional costs related to registration, certification, and compliance with professional standards.

5. Are there any unintended consequences the Board might not have considered in relation to the proposed change of title?

1. Confusion and Overlap with Other Medical Titles

- **Unintended Confusion:** The new title might overlap with titles used by other healthcare professionals, like "surgeon" or "surgical specialist," which could lead to confusion among consumers about the scope of practice and qualifications of podiatric surgeons. For example, some might mistakenly believe that a "surgical podiatrist" is a general surgeon or that their qualifications are equivalent to those of a medical doctor.

2. Perceived Hierarchy within the Profession

- **Division among Podiatrists:** Introducing the term "surgical" might create a divide between podiatrists who perform surgery and those who focus on other aspects of podiatric care (such as biomechanics, wound care, or diabetic foot care). This could foster tension or resentment within the profession, as some might feel their expertise is being devalued or overshadowed by a focus on surgery.
- **Devaluation of Non-Surgical Expertise:** Other areas of podiatry might feel sidelined, leading to a diminished focus on non-surgical specialties that are vital to patient care, such as preventive care, rehabilitation, and overall foot health.

3. Impact on Interprofessional Relationships

- **Strained Relationships with General Surgeons or Other Specialists:** The term "surgical podiatrist" may cause tensions with general surgeons or other surgical specialists who may view this as encroaching on their territory. This could impact collaborative relationships between podiatrists and other healthcare providers.

4. Challenges in Consumer Trust and Understanding

- **Increased Consumer Confusion:** The new title might lead to increased consumer questions about the level of training and the differences between podiatrists, surgical podiatrists, and other types of surgeons. This could result in confusion about who to consult for specific foot and ankle issues, especially among patients who are unfamiliar with the nuances of podiatric surgery.
- **Loss of Clarity in Public Messaging:** Despite the goal of greater clarity, the term "surgical podiatrist" might confuse the public more than help, as it could be unclear whether the person is a surgeon with expertise in a broader medical sense or a podiatrist with specialized training in surgery.

5. Unintended Legal and Regulatory Complexities

- **Scope of Practice Issues:** The change in title could lead to legal disputes or challenges regarding the scope of practice, especially in jurisdictions where the definition of "surgical" is very specific or regulated by law. This could

necessitate updates to laws, regulations, and licensing requirements, which could be time-consuming and costly for practitioners.

- **Increased Liability Concerns:** With a more explicit emphasis on surgery, podiatric surgeons might face greater scrutiny and liability concerns, as patients may expect a higher level of surgical competence, potentially opening the door to legal challenges if outcomes are less than ideal.

6. Marketability and Financial Impact

- **Pressure on Podiatric Surgeons:** The change could put additional financial pressure on podiatric surgeons to constantly market themselves as specialists, potentially increasing the costs of their services due to a higher perceived level of expertise. This might also make it more challenging for new practitioners or those just starting out to compete in the market.
- **Increased Training Costs:** If the title "surgical podiatrist" becomes a protected designation, this could lead to a demand for further specialized training or certification, which could be costly and time-consuming for practitioners to obtain.

7. Unintended Effects on Public Health Perception

- **Overemphasis on Surgery:** The term "surgical podiatrist" might inadvertently shift public focus toward surgery as the primary method of treatment for foot and ankle issues, when many conditions can be managed with conservative care. This could lead to unnecessary surgical interventions and increased healthcare costs for patients.

In the UK, the title of "podiatric surgeon" has not caused any confusion, and podiatric surgeons are well-respected and work collaboratively with other healthcare professionals. This system has worked effectively without the need for a protected title like "surgical podiatrist." The success of the current approach in the UK suggests that introducing a new title may not be necessary and could potentially create more complications than benefits. The UK's experience shows that podiatric surgeons can maintain professional identity and clarity without a protected title, offering valuable insight for the proposed change.

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Question B

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Your responses to the consultation questions

1. Do you agree with the proposal to change the protected title for the podiatry specialty of podiatric surgery to 'surgical podiatrist' to make it clear that the practitioner is a specialist podiatrist who performs surgery? Why or why not?

No I do not agree

The title has been in place for many years and clearly reflects that the practitioner is purely Podiatric in nature and is performing surgery. I myself have used the services of a podiatric surgeon and was aware that this was not a medically trained practitioner, but rather a Podiatrist who has surgical skills and access to provide the service in a hospital.

Sadly they do not have access to the public hospital system which I feel is unjust.

2. Do you have an alternative suggestion for the protected title? If yes, how would your suggested title achieve the same result as 'surgical podiatrist' in providing greater clarity to consumers?

3. What are the potential impacts for consumers of the proposed change in title?

Creating further consumer confusion.

4. What are the potential impacts, including potential costs, for podiatric surgeons of the proposed change in title?

5. Are there any unintended consequences the Board might not have considered in relation to the proposed change of title?

I think medical profession including Orthopaedic Surgeons are being elitist.

Orthopaedic Surgeons do not necessarily offer the same surgical procedure that my podiatric surgeon provided and I do not believe they would provide their patients with the options, unlike my surgeon who did advise that I could attend an Orthopaedic Surgeons for a different type of procedure and who was medically trained.

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- 1. Do you agree with the proposal to change the protected title for the podiatry specialty of podiatric surgery to 'surgical podiatrist' to make it clear that the practitioner is a specialist podiatrist who performs surgery? Why or why not?**

No this seems to be a title for a general podiatrist not a highly trained Podiatric Surgeon. Proper title is due for there high level of skill. Why change a title when there scope of practice has not changed.

- 2. Do you have an alternative suggestion for the protected title? If yes, how would your suggested title achieve the same result as 'surgical podiatrist' in providing greater clarity to consumers?**

Leave it as Podiatric Surgeon.

- 3. What are the potential impacts for consumers of the proposed change in title?**

Change of title is demeaning for these highly skilled professionals. Change of title resembles that there a general podiatrist.

- 4. What are the potential impacts, including potential costs, for podiatric surgeons of the proposed change in title?**

Reduce patient load as they have reduced faith with the change of terminology.

- 5. Are there any unintended consequences the Board might not have considered in relation to the proposed change of title?**

proposed title change could potentially stifle the development of future specialised fields within podiatry. As our profession evolves, there are growing opportunities for podiatric surgeons to contribute to emerging areas such as high-risk foot and ankle care, advanced biomechanics, and reconstructive surgery. By diminishing the recognition of our surgical specialty, AHPRA's proposal may hinder our ability to further develop these subspecialties, ultimately limiting the potential of our profession to expand and serve patients with complex needs.

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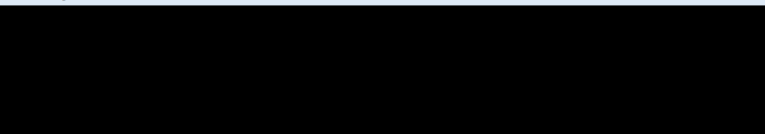
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No, I think the proposed change offers further confusion, allows room for alienation of the specialty from the medical fraternity, and would deter patients from accessing the service which has the potential to be more appropriate for their needs.
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2. Do you have an alternative suggestion for the protected title? If yes, how would your suggested title achieve the same result as 'surgical podiatrist' in providing greater clarity to consumers?

I believe podiatric surgeon is a sufficient title, as this infers the work is hospital based and complex, compared with general podiatry. I also feel it is specific enough not to be confused with an orthopaedic surgeon, which suggests someone appropriate to discuss both hip and back concerns with as it is more global. 'Podiatric' suggests feet and therefore not someone to consider for hip or back concerns.

3. What are the potential impacts for consumers of the proposed change in title?

None at all as the service won't change, what will change is the referral volume and further alienation of the clinicians. At a stretch confusion over billing, as patients will likely assume that surgical procedures are claimable under private health extras cover rather than hospital (in the rare event this is available).

4. What are the potential impacts, including potential costs, for podiatric surgeons of the proposed change in title?
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- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Revenue loss- Decreased referral rates- More complex pathways for hospital privilege allocation |
|---|

5. Are there any unintended consequences the Board might not have considered in relation to the proposed change of title?
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Profession:

☐ A member of the public?

☒ Other: Practice manager

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No. The term Podiatric surgeon is appropriate and accurate.

They have achieved surgical training to the appropriate AHPRA levels.

2. Do you have an alternative suggestion for the protected title? If yes, how would your suggested title achieve the same result as 'surgical podiatrist' in providing greater clarity to consumers?

The current title 'podiatric surgeon' is appropriate.

If there is indeed misunderstanding from the community or public, then the solution is more education and transparency.

Many patients are referred to specialist without knowing what the specialty isso they google it.

They trust the referring clinician to know the best pathway to proceed with their care.

3. What are the potential impacts for consumers of the proposed change in title?

If the title is changed, to "surgical podiatrist", consumers undergoing foot and ankle surgery may undervalue the training and expertise of these surgeons.

podiatric surgeons offer a much needed service. Stripping them of their title of surgeon is not in line with their training.

4. What are the potential impacts, including potential costs, for podiatric surgeons of the proposed change in title?

A change in title is likely to damage the current training of podiatric surgeons in Australia, which limits their services (and access) which will cause increased prices to patients.

And may cease services to more vulnerable areas and patients.

5. Are there any unintended consequences the Board might not have considered in relation to the proposed change of title?

Podiatric surgeons focus EXCLUSIVELY on the foot and ankle. Surgically and non-surgically, placing them in the best position to manage foot and ankle conditions.

Internationally, Podiatric surgeons and orthopaedic surgeons often work collaboratively (UK and USA models), & are considered equally successful in managing foot and ankle pathology.