

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

September 2024

This response template is the preferred way to submit your feedback to the public consultation on the Podiatry Board of Australia's proposed change to the protected title for the podiatry specialty of podiatric surgery.

Please provide any feedback in this document, including your responses to the questions in the text boxes on the following pages. The boxes will expand to accommodate your response. You do not need to respond to a question if you have no comment.

Making a submission

Please complete this response template and email to podiatryconsultation@ahpra.gov.au.

Consultation closes on 8 November 2024.

Publication of submissions

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Initial questions

To help us better understand your situation and the context of your feedback please provide us with some details about you. These details will not be published in any summary of the collated feedback from this consultation.

Question A

Are you completing this submission on behalf of an organisation or as an individual?

Your answer:

☒ Myself

Name: Elaheh Sanjari

Contact email: [REDACTED]

Question B

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

☒ A registered health practitioner?

Profession: Podiatrist

Question C

Would you like your submission to be published?

☒ Yes, publish my submission **with** my name/organisation name

☐ Yes, publish my submission **without** my name/ organisation name

☐ No – **do not** publish my submission

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. All/most general podiatrists perform minor surgeries, whereas podiatric surgeons have completed years of extra dedicated study to become experts in the field of foot and ankle surgery.

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?

Podiatric surgeon is the title that should be used. Any deviation from this is a step back for the podiatry profession. The current title explains who they are and what they do.

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

A change to the title would create greater confusion for consumers. Some podiatrists already market themselves as paediatric podiatrists, sports or musculoskeletal podiatrists, all mostly through having an interest in that area. Podiatric surgeons should not be called surgical podiatrists as they do not just have an interest in this area, they have extensive additional training and expertise.

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

Trust and respect given to podiatric surgeons would be lessened, significantly impacting their livelihood, careers and ability to provide care.

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

More bottlenecks in healthcare system with increased waiting times on orthopaedic surgeon lists as respect in podiatric surgeons is diminished and patients unnecessarily boycotting their services.

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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

Name: Rolf Scharfbillig

Contact email: [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

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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 as I do not believe that changing to surgical podiatrist will change the numbers of patients who do not realise that the surgeon they are seeing is a podiatrist and not trained as a medical practitioner. This is based on my experience with patients over the years, all of whom I have told that the referral is to a podiatrist who does surgery, but who will make comment consequently that they thought it was a medical practitioner surgeon they were seeing. Thus, a change of protected title will do little to change people's misconceptions in my opinion, as a lot of people assume anyone who does surgery is a medical practitioner, even if told otherwise and don't understand the difference. The main reason for questioning it later is the realisation that there is inequality in out of pocket expenses, as podiatric surgery is not covered by Medicare and a lot of health funds, so there is often a greater out of pocket expense - even though this is told to them by myself beforehand.

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 the best approach would be to make podiatric surgeons provide all patients with a standardised form stating that they are not medical practitioners and the implications of this re medicare, hospital admission, PATS and health funds and have them sign this prior to their initial consultation.

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

I do not believe there is any impact for consumers by changing the protected title, as detailed above.

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

Podiatric surgeons will need to change their information available to the public, otherwise I can't comment further.

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

Not to my knowledge

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Name of organisation:

Contact email:

☒ Myself

Name: [REDACTED]

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

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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, we do not agree with the change.

The title change was proposed as it was suggested by the independent review that there is confusion amongst the public as to the title. However, it is well known that there is significant confusion amongst the public about titles of all specialists and allied health professionals. I would suggest the public generally has a poor understanding of different specialist titles and the qualifications held by each of the disciplines.

Changing the title will not provide any further clarity but will potentially add further confusion. Taking away the term 'surgeon' could cause significant misunderstanding amongst patients and could take away the livelihood of our existing Podiatric Surgeons without cause or proper justification.

It has been well documented that this proposed title change plays into the hands of Orthopaedic surgeons who have been campaigning against Podiatric surgeons for no reason other than personal gains. This change does nothing to protect the public and could have significant detrimental effects to patients and the general public.

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?

No title is suggested as no change is necessary. Any change from the current title will add confusion to the general public.

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

Patients must be aware whether they are consulting a Podiatrist or Podiatric Surgeon. The current title serves as an appropriate distinction between the two. Understanding the surgical procedure being proposed or undertaken is crucial to the patient following post operative care protocols.

Patients seeking an alternate Surgeon to an Orthopaedic Surgeon need to be aware of Podiatric surgeons. Taking away this title will affect patient's ability to seek out these professionals as needed.

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

The impacts are immense. A change in title will take away the livelihoods of the Podiatric Surgeons completely. These surgeons have undertaken extensive training; at enormous financial and personal cost over many years. They should not be penalised based on this proposal which will not benefit anyone other than Orthopaedic surgeons.

All of the staff which work for Podiatric Surgeons will also be affected. This includes office staff as well as all the staff in hospitals who form part of the team including: Anaesthetists, scrub and scout nurses, Surgical Assistants, recovery nurses, admin, staff responsible for sterilising, orderlies etc.

All of the registrar who are currently training will lose their livelihood before they have had a chance to begin. The current cohort of registrars undertake this training over a 6 year period which comes at enormous personal and financial expense. The training program is robust, involved and develops registrars to become world class surgeons. It remains in the best interest of the public to avoid a situation in this country where Orthopaedic Surgeons have a monopoly on all foot and ankle surgery. It is well established; in any industry where there is a single service provider quality deteriorates and cost increases. This cannot be in the best interest of the public. This discussion comes at a time where waiting lists for surgery in public hospitals have blown out to the worse in history. The Podiatry Board should be seeking to expand Podiatric Surgeons into public facilities not seeking to diminish their work by taking away their established title

The title Podiatric Surgeon is accepted internationally, including in the UK and USA. A change in title sets Australia back. We should be leaders in healthcare not going backwards.

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

Taking away the title is detrimental to podiatrists in this country as well. Podiatric Surgeons have long been educators in Universities, running cadaver workshops and continuing professional learning opportunities for podiatry students and podiatrists. Podiatric Surgeons are a referral base for podiatrists to manage complex cases and provide surgical opinion for patients who have exhausted conservative care options.

Podiatrists who wish to expand their skillset, learn more and enhance their qualification can seek to become Podiatric Surgeons. Having this pathway opportunity enhances the entire profession.

Ultimately, it will be the public who loses if the title is not retained. Patients deserve the opportunity to choose a surgeon to undertake their foot and ankle surgery. Without this choice, as outlined above, the result will be poorer outcomes and rising costs.

Changing the protected title will have significant and far reaching consequences.

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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

Name: [Neville Starke](#)

Contact email: [REDACTED]

Question B

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

☐ A registered health practitioner?

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

☒ A member of the public?

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

Question C

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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 don't agree with changing the wording of the title. There is no evidence of public confusion or harm. On a personal basis there's no confusion of the role of a "podiatric surgeon". Changing a title that has been in use 25 years is likely to cause more confusion. Health care can be confusing enough for the average patient as is, we do not need more barriers and confusion. I believe changing the title risks undermining the professional and financial standing of podiatric surgeons currently working and even future entrants into the podiatry profession.

- 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 do not have an alternative suggestion, because why change something that is not broken. The only clarity I would like to see, is why podiatric surgery performed by a qualified, registered podiatric surgeon is not claimable under private health funds whereas orthopedic surgery is. This seems to be a confusing and frustrating anomaly to me.

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

As a rural resident, I am already at a disadvantage with the lack of podiatric surgeons in my region. By risking the weakening of the profession could have flow on effects of further reducing these services to rural areas. As mentioned above, private health funds already limit rebates on this surgery any change could be used to further reduce benefits.

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

I can not speak for the surgeons, but the title change contradicts current healthcare reforms and could undermine the profession.

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

The change could negatively affect future career progression and even entry into the profession creating even further difficulty to obtain this valuable service. Better education and advertising the profession would achieve better outcomes.

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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

Name: Click or tap here to enter text. ROBERT STALEY

Contact email: Click or tap here to enter text.

Question B

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

☒ A registered health practitioner?

Profession: Click or tap here to enter text. Orthopaedic Surgeon

☐ A member of the public?

☐ Other: Click or tap here to enter text.

Question C

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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 ~~Yes~~ It is very misleading to stay with podiatric surgeon. The majority of the public think that this is a title for a medically trained doctor. Surgical podiatrist may also be misleading as people still think it implies a doctor.

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?

Operating podiatrist or Procedural podiatrist

Gives the required information without designating a surgeon or misleading public.

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

Clarity, remove confusion, remove misleading advertising

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

Guided change of stationery and websites

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

Client uncertainty could be mitigated by a publicity/education campaign. Could include flyers from the Board of Podiatry available at operating podiatrists' rooms.