

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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Question A

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

Your answer:

Organisation

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

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

Myself

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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?

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.
The term 'podiatric surgeon' uses the same format as other types of surgeon (orthopaedic, dental, vascular...). It is the most appropriate term as it denotes a surgeon who has come from a podiatric background.

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?

Foot and Ankle Surgeon (Podiatrist). This makes it clear that the scope of surgery is foot and ankle, and that the practitioner is a podiatrist.

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

Creating further confusion.

The term surgical podiatrist is ambiguous, and has the potential to be mis-used by podiatrists who do very minor procedures such as nail surgery. The training for podiatric surgery is appropriate to denote the practitioner as a surgeon, and removing 'surgeon' from the title suggests the practitioner is 'not a real surgeon'.

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?

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Myself

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Question B

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A registered health practitioner?

Profession: Podiatric Surgery

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. 'Surgical podiatrist' is a nonsense name created by another profession. It is poor use of the English language as a professional descriptor. Change of title does not protect the public in any way. The same attack on our profession by orthopaedics arose in the UK several years ago. Title is not the issue, Some groups of orthopaedic surgeons periodically seek to attack podiatric surgery. Please read:

Borthwick, Alan M. (2000) Challenging medicine: the case of podiatric surgery. *Work, Employment and Society*, 14 (2), 369-383.

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. Keep podiatric surgeon. Educate everybody and take positive steps to improve the profession and care of patients. Take positive steps to make better links with orthopaedic surgery, plastic surgery, vascular surgery, etc... so we can all work together to care for patients instead of fighting over title, etc...

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

Confusion. Podiatric surgeons work in the UK private and public systems. I work alongside all other surgical specialities and my job title is consultant podiatric surgeon. UK podiatric surgery patients are better informed of the training and experience of podiatric surgeons than UK orthopaedic foot surgeons' patients.

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

Potential loss of confidence from their patients primarily due to confusion and negativity created by letting a completely different profession dictate the title of a specialism within podiatry

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

If you change the title of a podiatric surgeon, what's next? What will orthopaedic surgeons who devote their time to denigrating another profession want from you next? How do you think changing the title will impact the profession locally and internationally? Do you really think that a change of title really improves a single patient's care?

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Myself

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Profession: specialist podiatrist

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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 with the change.

This is a registered title and reflective of the international nomenclature for the professional specialty.

There is no proposal for a change in other professional disciplines such as "oral surgeons", "dental surgeons" etc to consider this change in the protected title.

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 term Podiatric Surgeon is reflective of the profession and scope of practice and intervention.

Many patients source podiatric surgeons over other surgical providers as they are aware of the podiatric based surgical training and expertise.

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

This would confuse patients, given the many years of the established protected title.

National and international literature emphasises podiatric surgery and not the term "surgical podiatrist".

Patients would be misinformed and the erroneous comment of "podiatrist are not surgeons" will create confusion.

Podiatric Surgeons are specialist podiatrists that perform surgery.

The protected title of "Podiatric Surgeon" is valid and appropriate.

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

Loss of patient confidence and disturbance in GP practitioner base with regards to practitioner standing in the surgical arena.

Adversely affect appropriate referral pathways and patient management.

Health fund and hospital base confusion in nomenclature change.

Create difficulty in accreditation with hospitals and Day Surgery Centres

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

Future progression of the profession would be affected.

The standing of podiatric surgery will be degraded.

It appears that the issue is raised by another surgical discipline in attempt to limit and reduce competition within the surgical management of foot pathologies.

The nomenclature change would provide a base for argument and possible discredit the surgical standing of highly qualified Podiatric Surgeons.

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Profession: Podiatrist

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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 with the proposal to change the protected title for the podiatry specialty to "surgical podiatrist." The current title of "podiatric surgeon" is already clear and accurately reflects the practitioner's role as a specialist podiatrist who performs surgery. Changing the title may create unnecessary confusion and redundancy, as the existing designation is well understood within the medical community and public. There is no pressing need for a change, as the current terminology is sufficient to communicate the expertise and scope of practice of these professionals. I am not a podiatric surgeon and just a general podiatrist but I feel that it is unfair for podiatric surgeons who undergo years of training and practice but could not rightfully be recognized and acknowledged if they could not use their current title.

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, I do not have an alternative suggestion for the protected title. The current title of "podiatric surgeon" is already appropriate and clearly reflects the role of a specialist podiatrist who performs surgery. The title "surgical podiatrist" could create confusion as many general podiatrists, including those without surgical specialization, are qualified to perform some minor surgeries too but are not trained like podiatric surgeon. In reality, podiatric surgeons undergo specific training and qualifications that distinguish them from general podiatrists, and the current title already conveys this distinction effectively. Changing the title could lead to ambiguity and does not add value in terms of clarity for consumers.

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

The potential impacts for consumers of the proposed change in title could include confusion and a lack of clarity about the qualifications and scope of practice of different types of podiatrists.

Currently, the title "podiatric surgeon" clearly differentiates those who have undergone advanced surgical training and are specialists in performing surgery. If the title were changed to "surgical podiatrist," consumers may not fully understand that there is a distinction between general podiatrists, who may perform some minor procedures, and those who are qualified to carry out more complex surgical interventions. This could lead to confusion about the level of expertise a patient should expect when seeking care and potentially undermine trust in the profession.

Overall, the proposed title change may inadvertently reduce the clarity and precision of the current designation, which could ultimately affect consumer understanding and decision-making when choosing a healthcare provider.

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

The potential impacts, including costs, for podiatric surgeons of the proposed change in title could be significant.

Professional Clarity and Recognition: The change to "surgical podiatrist" could dilute the distinction between podiatric surgeons and general podiatrists. Podiatric surgeons have completed extensive training and specialization in surgery, and the current title of "podiatric surgeon" clearly reflects this level of expertise. A shift to "surgical podiatrist" may create confusion about the scope of practice,

potentially undermining the credibility and professional recognition of those who have pursued advanced surgical training.

Impact on Patient Trust: As the title "surgical podiatrist" could be interpreted as less specialized, patients may be less likely to view podiatric surgeons as the highly skilled professionals they are. This could affect patient confidence and trust, which are vital in medical practice.

Rebranding and Communication Costs: Changing the title would likely require podiatric surgeons to update their professional materials, including business cards, websites, advertising, and possibly even signage at their clinics. This rebranding effort would incur costs, particularly for those who have already established their practice under the current title. Additionally, communication campaigns to inform patients and the public about the new title would be needed, adding further financial and time investments.

Legal and Regulatory Adjustments: The change in title would likely require updates in professional regulations, licensing, and insurance documents. This could involve costs for administrative updates, compliance with new regulations, and potentially even re-certification or re-accreditation processes depending on jurisdiction.

Overall, while the change may be intended to provide clarity, it could result in confusion, a loss of professional distinction, and a range of additional costs for podiatric surgeons that may not be justified by the potential benefits.

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

There are several potential unintended consequences the Board might not have fully considered in relation to the proposed change of title:

Confusion and Consumer Misunderstanding: As mentioned previously, the proposed title change could create confusion among consumers. Patients may assume that all podiatrists are equally qualified to perform surgery, which could undermine the public's understanding of the advanced training required to become a podiatric surgeon. This might lead to patients seeking surgery from other general podiatrist or other surgeons. Public understand that Sport podiatrist is podiatrist who is more into sport injuries or sport related problems. Similarly, people may think Surgical podiatrist is just podiatrist who is more into performing surgeries than general podiatrist.

Dilution of Professional Identity: The title "podiatric surgeon" clearly conveys a specialist role, distinguishing those who have undergone rigorous surgical training from general podiatrists. Changing it to "surgical podiatrist" could blur the line between the two, potentially diminishing the professional identity of podiatric surgeons and their status as specialists in the field. This could lead to a reduced recognition of the level of expertise and training required to be a podiatric surgeon.

Impact on Interprofessional Relationships: The change in title could also affect relationships with other healthcare professionals. Medical doctors, surgeons, and other specialists may already have a clear understanding of the role and expertise of podiatric surgeons under the current title. A change in the title might cause confusion in interdisciplinary collaboration and referrals, particularly if colleagues misunderstand the scope of practice of podiatric surgeons versus general podiatrists.

Increased Risk of Professional Fragmentation: If the new title is not universally accepted or understood, it could lead to fragmentation within the profession itself. Some podiatric surgeons may resist the change, leading to division within the field. This could affect unity in advocacy efforts, credentialing processes, and public education about the role of podiatric surgeons.

Costs of Implementation: The financial burden of the title change could also be an unintended consequence. Podiatric surgeons would need to update professional materials, legal documents, signage, websites, and other branding materials. There may also be indirect costs related to re-education and communication efforts to ensure that the new title is properly understood by patients, healthcare providers, and the public.

Potential for Increased Liability and Patient Expectations: Changing the title to "surgical podiatrist" might raise expectations about the scope of practice or expertise in surgery. This will create a mismatch between patient expectations and actual competencies.

In conclusion, while the proposed change might be aimed at clarifying the role of podiatric surgeons, it could have several unintended negative consequences, from confusion among patients to fragmentation within the profession. These factors should be carefully considered before any changes are made.

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Question B

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Profession: [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?

I agree for the need to change the title from podiatric surgeon to an alternative, but not to surgical podiatrist.

The public see or hear the word surgeon and surgical and think of a medical practitioner.

That is someone who has been to medical school for 5-6 years then worked as a junior doctor and then undertaken subspecialty training 4-6 years to be earn the justification to call themselves a surgeon.

The recent change to the National Law introduced in section 115A has restricted the uses of the title surgeon for use by medical practitioners holding specialist registration in surgery /obstetrics/ophthalmology.

In the interests of patient safety and awareness, these rules should be applied across the entire health care profession and not just to medical practitioners.

I frequently see patients who have seen a " podiatric surgeon " ,who even after seeing them are not aware that the person they have seen is not a medically trained 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?

My alternative would be an Operative Podiatrist or Operating Podiatrist.

This would distinguish them from a podiatrist who does not operate yet would still imply additional training has been undertaken and that they can "operate".

It would leave no doubt that an Operating Podiatrist had not been to medical school or was a medical practitioner

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

Consumers will be better able to make an informed decision as to who they see for their foot condition.

By changing the title it means consumers will be aware there is a difference between a medical practitioner who has become a surgeon and a podiatrist who has trained to operate.

Consumers will have the ability to choose to ask about the level of training that the person who may be operating on their foot has had to undertake to enable them to use that title.

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

If and when a new term such as "Operative Podiatrist" is introduced, the terms "Podiatric Surgeon" and "Foot and Ankle Surgeon" need to be removed from the Operative Podiatrists' websites and advertisements. This would incur some cost

This would require podiatric surgeons to be more open with consumers about their training in comparison to medical practitioners.

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

I am unaware of any unintended consequences.