

6th November 2018

To:

A/Prof Mark Daniell, RANZCO President

Dr Heather Mack RANZCO President-elect

RANZCO Board

Dr David Andrews, CEO, RANZCO

Copy to:

Dr Phillip Truskett AM, Chair, Council of Presidents of Medical Colleges (CPMC)

A/Prof Jill Sewell, President, Australian Medical Council (AMC)

Professor Kate Leslie AO, Chair, Specialist Education Accreditation Committee, AMC

Mr Michael Gorton, Chair, AHPRA Agency Management Committee

Dr Tony Bartone, AMA President

We, the undersigned, as health professionals, academics and members of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and health services offer this letter of objection to RANZCO's response to Dr Kristopher Rallah-Baker's article 'Closing the gap from both sides' published in Insight News (07/09/2018). We also extend our support to Dr Rallah-Baker, a proud Yuggera and Birri-Gubba-Juru man and Australia's first and only Indigenous Ophthalmologist, acknowledging the great risk he has undertaken personally and professionally to speak publicly about his experiences of racism and bullying within his profession.

Dr Rallah-Baker, as a Fellow of your College, and as President of the Australian Indigenous Doctor's Association, knows only too well the realities of racism in the health system from professional, personal and policy perspectives. His insightful and forthright statement of facts provided an opportunity for RANZCO to realise the vision of The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan (2013 – 2023) of "a health system free of racism". Unfortunately, in the editorial response provided by CEO Dr David Andrews on the 31st October 2018, Dr Rallah-Baker's experiences were discounted and dismissed without investigation.

The apparent interchangeable use of terms such as cultural safety, cultural sensitivity, cultural awareness and cultural appropriateness and inappropriate terminology in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples is itself, demonstrative of RANZCO's need to build its capacity in this area. The refusal to acknowledge racism as a factor in Indigenous

health, educational and employment outcomes while publicly extolling the virtues of only non-Indigenous ophthalmologists in advancing Indigenous eye health outcomes is problematic, not least because it also erases the efforts of an (often underpaid) Indigenous health worker workforce who have and continue to be critical to the provision of eye health services to Indigenous communities.

As attendees of a recent National Indigenous Health Workforce Leadership Conference (convened by The University of Queensland and supported by The Lowitja Institute, 2nd November 2018), in which racism was noted as a central workforce challenge for Indigenous health professionals across the health system, RANZCO's stance does not appear to be conducive to redressing the gross underrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples within ophthalmology. Dr Rallah-Baker's powerful and instructive testimony should not have been so swiftly dismissed particularly given the 2016 Accreditation Report into the Training and Education Programs of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists which noted that 15 standards were **not met** which included:

Standard 1.1.6 governance

Standard 1.3.1 reconsideration, review and appeal processes

Standard 1.3.2 process for evaluating de-identified appeals and complaints

Standard 1.6.4 effective partnerships in Indigenous health sector

Standard 3.2.8 curriculum includes formal learning about research methodology, critical appraisal and evidence-based practice

Standard 3.2.9 curriculum develops understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Māori health, history and cultures

Standard 3.2.10 curriculum develops understanding of relationship between culture and health

Standard 3.4.3 program allows for part-time, interrupted and other forms of flexible training

Standard 5.2.3 using valid methods of standard setting

Standard 6.1.3 trainees contribute to monitoring and program development

Standard 6.2.1 develops standards against which its program and graduate outcomes are evaluated

Standard 6.3 feedback, reporting and action

Standard 7.1.3 supports increased recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and/or Māori trainees

Standard 7.5 resolution of training problems and disputes

Standard 8.1.4 routinely evaluates supervisor effectiveness

Further the report notes;

As a matter of urgency, the College must review and consistently implement its reconsideration, review and appeals policy, as well as its complaints policy and processes. The College must also address the issue of discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment in its training program.

A 2015 report of research commissioned by RANZCO found that 50% of Trainees/Registrars who responded reported experiencing discrimination, bullying, sexual harassment or harassment. And, 84.8% of respondents advised that they had not participated in any training to deal with those behaviours in the last 5 years. Such damning evidence appears contrary to Dr Andrews' claim that the college does not tolerate the behaviours outlined by Dr Rallah-Baker and that they have "a robust complaints process to deal with bullying and discrimination".

Dr Rallah-Baker, in his commitment to closing the gap in Indigenous health inequality has afforded RANZCO the opportunity to be part of the solution. We urge RANZCO to take up the call for the necessary institutional reform needed to ensure that Dr Rallah-Baker is not the first and last Indigenous ophthalmologist in this country. We urge you to listen and learn from his experiences and further, commit to action in the interests of Indigenous health justice.

We write this public letter, not at his request or initiation, but to stand in solidarity with him, and to let you know your responses have no place in a modern Australia, will have no positive impact on the health outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, nor will it positively influence the thousands of health professionals in Australia and New Zealand who could use this as a 'teachable moment' in how to respond to and address racism in the health system. Racism remains a real workplace issue and a very real health issue for Indigenous peoples and ignoring it is counterproductive to ensuring patient safety and clinical safety and is a clear breach of the college's accreditation standards.

We call on RANZCO to undertake the following:

- Provide an unreserved apology to Dr Kris Rallah-Baker from the CEO and Board for its callous disregard of his experiences of racism and bullying and the attempt to publicly undermine his integrity and commitment to his profession and his people.
- Engage in an independently facilitated discussion with Dr Rallah-Baker to review and meaningfully address the concerns he has raised
- Outline what specific strategies it has in place to safely support its members in reporting discrimination, harassment and bullying and what consequences result from such behaviours
- Advise what actions RANZCO will undertake in ensuring all of its staff, board and members have a sufficient practical and theoretical understanding of what constitutes a culturally safe ophthalmology as experienced by the providers of care as well as its recipients.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Gregory Phillips, CEO ABSTARR Consulting & Professor of First People's Health,
Griffith University

Dr Chelsea Bond, Senior Research Fellow, The University of Queensland

The Australian Indigenous Doctors Association,

On behalf of members of the Leaders in Indigenous Medical Education (LIME) Network Secretariat and Reference Group and including:

- Dr Elana Curtis, Associate Professor, The University of Auckland
- Dr David Paul, Associate Dean, The University of Notre Dame
- Dr Stewart Sutherland, Lecturer in Indigenous Health, Australian National University
- Dr Dennis McDermott, Director, The Poche Centre for Indigenous Health and Wellbeing, Flinders University
- Tania Huria, Senior Lecturer, The University of Otago
- Dr Teresa Treweek, Senior Lecturer, The University of Wollongong
- Dr Lilon Bandler, Associate Professor, The University of Sydney
- Liesa Clague, Lecturer, Macquarie University
- Telphia-Leanne Joseph, Associate Lecturer, The University of New South Wales

Assoc/Prof (Dr) Shannon Springer, Director of Indigenous Health, Faculty of Health Sciences & Medicine, Bond University Gold Coast

Professor Mark Brough, School of Public Health and Social Work, Faculty of Health, Queensland University of Technology

Associate Professor Deborah Askew, Conjoint Associate Professor in General Practice Research, Primary Care Clinical Unit, Faculty of Medicine, University of Queensland

Dr Bryan Mukandi, Lecturer, Faculty of Medicine, The University of Queensland

Dr Geoffrey Spurling, GP and Senior Lecturer, The University of Queensland

Dr Warren Jennings, Senior Lecturer, Primary Care Clinical Unit University of Queensland

Dr Alyce Wilson, Lecturer, Department of Medical Education, University of Melbourne

Dr Deb Duthie, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Health, Qld University of Technology

Assoc Prof Janya McCalman, Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Indigenous Health Equity Research, Central Queensland University

Ms Sandra Campbell, Senior Research Fellow, Indigenous Health, Research Division, Central Queensland University

Gary Torrens, Nurse Unit Manager, Southern Qld Centre of Excellence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care, Qld Health

Miss Melissa Browning, Coordinator, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Service, GCHHS

Debbie Bargallie, First Peoples Health Unit, Griffith University

Marlene Longbottom, Aboriginal Postdoctoral Research Fellow, University of Wollongong.
Miss Brenna Bernardino Research Assistant, Griffith University

Miss Janet Stajic, Indigenous Health Research Officer, University of Queensland

Ms Natasha Lee, Master of Public Health Student, University of Queensland, Member

Mr. James Tronc, Indigenous Medical Student, The University of Queensland.

Ms Natasha Lee, Master of Public Health Student, University of Queensland, Member of
Public Health Association Australia and Indigenous Allied Health Association

Ms Dr Gabriella Zizzo, Early Career Researcher, South Australia

Wendy Turner, Teacher, Indigenous Primary Health Care

Mr Jermaine Isua, Clan member of the Saibai Koedal peoples

Miss Maddison Adams, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community member, Brisbane

Dr Chris Platania-Phung

Smitha Mandre-Jackson

Darlene Rotumah