

INAPPROPRIATE MEDICAL ADVERTISING EXPLOITS VULNERABLE PEOPLE

AMA Position Statement on Advertising and Public Endorsement

Advertising that promotes unrealistic body images or depicts normal human conditions and experiences as pathological conditions requiring medical treatment can exploit vulnerable people and lead to mental ill-health, the AMA said today.

Releasing the *AMA Position Statement on Advertising and Public Endorsement*, AMA President Dr Khorshid said doctors should ensure than any advertising they take part in, including via social media, assists informed patient choice and does not undermine it.

“Inappropriate advertising can lead people to use products or services indiscriminately or unnecessarily, potentially resulting in physical, psychological or financial harm,” Dr Khorshid said.

“The AMA is troubled by medical advertising practices that promote unrealistic body images, particularly where these concerns relate to common features of the human lifecycle.

“Wrinkles, loose skin, and baldness are part of the natural ageing process, and emotions such as grief and day-to-day worries are not necessarily pathological conditions requiring medical treatment.

“The AMA is increasingly concerned about advertising practices that seek to make people think that these are pathological conditions requiring treatment. This can lead vulnerable people to seek unnecessary treatments, and can contribute to poor mental health.

“Doctors should not promote products or services in a manner that encourages unnecessary medical consumerism or encourages individuals to view their personal experiences and appearance through a medical lens.”

Dr Khorshid said that social media provides doctors with a unique opportunity to promote their services and engage directly with patients, but caution must be exercised.

“The interactive nature of social media platforms allows doctors to provide real-time information on changes to practice arrangements or to raise particular public health concerns,” Dr Khorshid said.

“But the doctor is ultimately responsible for all content posted on their social media accounts, including posts by other people, including patients.

“A positive comment from a patient about their doctor may be considered a testimonial, which is prohibited under the National Law. It may be worth disabling the ability for third parties to post comments on their own social media accounts.”

The Position Statement has been revised to reflect the professional obligations set out by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra), the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) and other relevant agencies.

It also provides guidance to doctors in achieving high standards of ethical behaviour in relation to advertising and endorsement of products and services.

The AMA *Position Statement on Advertising and Public Endorsement* is available [here](#).

Background

Doctors are prohibited under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law from advertising that:

- Is false, misleading or deceptive, or is likely to be misleading or deceptive;
- Offers a gift, discount or other inducement to attract a user of the service without stating the terms and conditions of the offer;
- Uses testimonials or purported testimonials;
- Creates an unreasonable expectation of beneficial treatment; or
- Encourages the indiscriminate or unnecessary use of regulated health services, whether directly or indirectly.

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