




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

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**HEALTH PRACTITIONER REGULATION NATIONAL LAW (SURGEONS)
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms LAUGA** (Keppel—ALP) (12.13 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (Surgeons) Amendment Bill 2023. This bill responds to findings and recommendations from numerous reports and reviews into the regulation of cosmetic surgery in Australia and the demonstrated need to strengthen title protections under the national law. The Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services and Minister for Women has already outlined the major amendments in the bill. I want to focus my remarks on the critical role of this legislation in improving patient protection and transparency.

The cosmetic surgery industry is growing exponentially and the sector is becoming difficult and dangerous for healthcare consumers to navigate. That is why this bill is so important. It is a commonsense reform to reflect what the public already reasonably assumes—that doctors calling themselves a surgeon or a cosmetic surgeon should have the advanced surgical training to go along with the title. Feedback from a national consultation process on title protection and cosmetic surgery confirms some cosmetic surgery consumers bear heavy costs for their procedures. These have sadly included health complications, hospital visits to correct botched surgeries, loss of income and time, and mental distress.

I want to take a moment to give real-life examples of some of the heartbreaking stories we have heard in our consideration of the need to strengthen the regulation of cosmetic surgery in Australia. The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal heard that a medical practitioner holding general registration had asked their receptionist to help perform several lengthy liposuction operations and translate signed consent forms for a consumer with limited comprehension of English. The tribunal further heard that on several occasions the practitioner's performance of these procedures resulted in adverse patient outcomes that required review by other medical specialties. The postoperative outcomes of several of these patients were found to warrant notification to the Medical Board of Australia.

In another case, the health complaints commission in New South Wales filed complaints against a practitioner for failing to adequately conduct assessments prior to the surgery of patients. The practitioner did not obtain informed consent from prospective consumers prior to performing various procedures. The practitioner was also said to have woken and sat patients up during surgical procedures to inquire if patients were happy with the size and positioning of breast implants inserted or instead requested associates to enter the room to comment. Information provided about postoperative care was also deemed insufficient or not provided to patients at all. Following breast augmentation procedures, patients reported being in extreme pain requiring medical intervention, developed fevers and infections, had wounds split open post surgery and had stitches dissolve, resulting in strep infections. Another person alleged that they arrived at the practitioner's surgery to undergo a breast augmentation and received no hospital gown or sedation and was in excruciating pain. They revealed that they were told they could leave immediately after the procedure.

The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency provided the Health and Environment Committee with recent data on complaints about cosmetic surgery. Ahpra established a cosmetic surgery hotline in September of last year. As of 22 May, it had already received 222 calls leading to 112 new notifications related to cosmetic practices. The reality is that at times there are significant information and power imbalances between the public and these practitioners. The title protection system in the national law helps to balance this asymmetry by improving transparency for patients and consumers. Findings from the national consultation reveal that people are often confused about health practitioner titles and about the qualifications that go along with the titles. This has become increasingly evident when we look at the harrowing cases I have just spoken about. Let me be very clear: no person should have to endure such treatment from a medical professional. It is important to mention that most doctors are diligent, conscientious and work to the highest standards for their patients. However, there are some practitioners who perform beyond their scope, put profits before the interests of their patients and take advantage of the public's trust. This bill goes a long way to addressing these issues.

The bill protects the title of surgeon by creating new offences to ensure only those medical practitioners with significant surgical training can hold themselves out as a surgeon. This bill will assure Queenslanders that doctors using the title 'surgeon' have appropriate training and qualifications to perform surgical procedures. This reform will protect patients. It will increase satisfaction with operative outcomes and improve public confidence in the medical profession and the national scheme. While practitioners' scope of practice will not be limited by the reform, patients will have more insight when choosing a practitioner to perform surgical procedures. By further strengthening title protections under the national law, this bill demonstrates the Palaszczuk government's commitment to protecting the safety of Queenslanders. I commend the bill to the House.