

Media release

15 December 2016

The urgent need to regulate sonographers in Australia

Today a NSW sonographer was found guilty of nine charges of aggravated indecent assault on five women, which occurred while he was working at medical centres in Cronulla and North Sydney between 2011 and 2014. **This case highlights the urgent need for sonographers to be nationally regulated in Australia.**

Every week thousands of patients benefit from diagnostic ultrasound and they deserve to be protected with a legislated registration process. Regulated health professionals are required by law to abide by professional practice standards and can be struck off for breaches of these standards. Sonography is not currently a regulated profession and the impact of this is highlighted by this case.

The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency is responsible for protecting members of the public who access health services, by setting national standards and handling complaints. In Australia, sonographers are one of the few health diagnostic imaging professions that are not regulated by this agency.

Sonographers must be regulated through a nationally consistent system to assure the safety of patients and quality sonographic services, as they are in other countries such as New Zealand.

It is distressing to note that previous concerns about this sonographer were raised with New South Wales Health Care Complaints Commission in 2011. However, the accused remained a risk to patients for a further four years until the police became involved in 2015.

Background

Sonographers are highly skilled allied health professionals with over five years of tertiary education, to be able to undertake complex diagnostic medical sonographic examinations using ultrasound.

Sonographers who are members of the Australasian Sonographers Association and the Australasian Society for Ultrasound in Medicine voluntarily agree to high standards of conduct and professional practice, however not all Australian sonographers are members of these associations.

In previous years, and again in 2016, the Australasian Sonographers Association and the Australasian Society for Ultrasound in Medicine approached the Commonwealth Government seeking to have sonographers regulated by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency.

Key point(s):

- The Australasian Sonographers Association and the Australasian Society for Ultrasound in Medicine are peak bodies that represent over 80% of sonographers in Australia
- Sonographers need to be regulated by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency to assure patient safety.
- The Australasian Sonographers Association and the Australasian Society for Ultrasound in Medicine stress the urgent need for the regulation of sonography profession, as shown by multiple submissions to Australian governments

For more information contact:

Tony Forshaw, President, Australasian Sonographers Association

Ph: 03 9552 0000

E: president@a-s-a.com.au

Assoc. Prof George Condous, President, Australasian Society for Ultrasound in Medicine

E: asum@asum.com.au

Lyndal Macpherson, CEO, Australasian Society for Ultrasound in Medicine

Ph: 02 9438 2078

E: l.macpherson@asum.com.au