CPMC Council of Presidents of Medical Colleges

Professionalism and Culture Workshop

Workshop Outcomes Report

Background

Professionalism, workplace culture and psychological safety are increasingly recognised as critical enablers of safe, high-quality healthcare. Recent events across the health system, together with growing expectations from governments, regulators and the community, have highlighted the need to strengthen professional culture and support clinicians to speak up when patient safety is at risk.

Health Ministers have reinforced the expectation that healthcare organisations foster cultures where concerns are identified and addressed early, noting that the culture of silence must not continue. At the same time, the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care is progressing a new National Model for Clinical Governance, while Ahpra and the Medical Board of Australia continue to strengthen their focus on professionalism, respectful workplaces and practitioner behaviour.

While Colleges have developed significant resources in this area, there has been no shared, profession-led framework bringing together the principles of professionalism, leadership, workplace culture, psychological safety and patient safety across specialist medicine. CPMC convened this workshop to explore whether there was support for developing such a framework and to identify the priorities that should guide its development.

Introduction

On behalf of CPMC, I would like to sincerely thank everyone who contributed their time, expertise and perspectives at the CPMC Professionalism and Culture Workshop held on 3rd June 2026.

The willingness of participants to openly share experiences and ideas made for a thoughtful and constructive discussion on one of the most important issues facing the specialist medical profession.

The workshop was designed as a collaborative consultation rather than a framework development exercise. Its purpose was to test whether there was a shared appetite for a cross-college approach to professionalism and, if so, to identify the issues that such a framework should address.

The workshop was informed by presentations from Safer Care Victoria, the AMA Doctors in Training, the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, and ANZCA and provided the foundation for the discussions.

While participants represented different organisations and perspectives, there was broad alignment on both the challenges facing the profession and the opportunity for collective leadership. Rather than focusing solely on individual behaviour or disciplinary processes, participants consistently highlighted the importance of leadership, workplace culture, psychological safety, supervision and system factors in supporting professionalism and improving patient care.

There was also strong consensus that this work should build on the significant efforts already undertaken across the profession. Participants encouraged CPMC to amplify what already exists rather than duplicate it, recognising the valuable work already developed by colleges, regulators and professional bodies. There was support for using the ANZCA *Supporting Professionalism and Performance* guide as the foundation for developing a cross-college professionalism framework that can be adapted across specialist medicine.

This report captures the key messages identified by participants during the workshop. While it is not intended to reflect every discussion point, it brings together the consistent themes that emerged throughout the session. These insights will inform the development of a cross-college Professionalism Framework.

Key Messages from Participants

Key Message 1

Professionalism is a shared responsibility between individuals and the system

Participants consistently recognised that professionalism cannot be viewed solely through the behaviour of individual clinicians. While individuals must remain accountable for their actions, the system and environment in which they work can either enable professionalism or create conditions that contribute to poor behaviours and performance. Factors such as leadership, workplace culture, workload, supervision, governance and organisational support has a significant influence.

There was broad agreement that any future approach to professionalism should acknowledge both individual responsibility and the responsibility of organisations to create environments that support professional practice which aligns with the ANZCA framework.

Key Message 2

Build on existing work

Participants were clear that the profession does not need another standalone code or policy. Instead, there was strong support for CPMC bringing together the significant work that already exists across colleges and the broader health sector.

Participants consistently encouraged CPMC to:

- amplify rather than reinvent
- align existing frameworks and established resources
- recognise work already undertaken by colleges
- provide consistency without duplication
- build upon the ANZCA Professionalism and Performance Guide, Medical Board of Australia's Good medical practice: a code of conduct for doctors in Australia, Medical Council of New Zealand's Good medical practice and existing College resources.

Key Message 3

Shared expectations will strengthen consistency

Participants identified considerable variation across specialist medicine in expectations of professional behaviour, leadership, supervision, reporting pathways and approaches to remediation.

While recognising that individual Colleges have different contexts and responsibilities, there was broad agreement that greater consistency would benefit trainees, Fellows, employers and patients.

There was strong support for developing:

- shared expectations
- common behavioural standards
- agreed pathways
- consistent approaches to prevention, reporting and remediation
- common language around professionalism.

Participants emphasised that consistency should support, rather than replace, existing governance and regulatory arrangements.

Key Message 4

Leadership sets the standard for professional culture

Leadership was recognised as fundamental to creating and sustaining professional cultures. Participants consistently emphasised that professionalism is demonstrated through everyday leadership behaviours, not simply organisational policies or responses when issues arise.

The discussion highlighted the important role of leaders, supervisors and educators in modelling professional behaviour, providing constructive feedback, supporting reflective practice and addressing concerns early. Participants also recognised that executive leadership and Boards have an important role in establishing organisational expectations and accountability.

Professionalism was viewed as something that must be actively led and reinforced throughout organisations.

Participants highlighted the need to strengthen:

- leadership capability
- reflective practice
- supervisor development
- giving and receiving feedback
- performance conversations
- accountability at all organisational levels.

Key Message 5

Psychological safety is essential

Participants repeatedly identified hierarchy and fear of speaking up and uncertainty about reporting concerns, particularly for trainees, junior doctors, Specialist International Medical Graduates (SIMGs) and students, as significant barriers to identifying professionalism concerns.

Many noted that trainees, junior doctors, SIMGs and students often fear:

- career consequences
- retaliation
- nothing changing
- unclear reporting pathways.

Participants recognised that people are more likely to seek support, acknowledge mistakes, provide feedback and raise concerns when they work in environments where they feel respected and safe to do so.

Creating psychologically safe workplaces was viewed as essential to improving both professional culture and patient safety.

Participants highlighted:

- speaking up without fear
- supportive workplace cultures
- safe reporting pathways
- respectful communication
- learning from mistakes
- inclusion of trainees, SIMGs and junior doctors.

Key Message 6

Prevention should take precedence over punishment

Participants consistently favoured a developmental approach to professionalism rather than one focused primarily on complaints and disciplinary processes.

The discussion emphasised the importance of early intervention, mentoring, coaching and reflective practice in supporting professional growth and addressing concerns before they escalate. Participants recognised that while regulatory processes remain important, professionalism is best strengthened through education, support and continuous learning.

There was broad agreement that prevention should be embedded throughout the professional journey rather than only becoming a focus once problems arise.

A future framework should support:

- reflective practice
- mentoring
- coaching
- early intervention
- supported remediation
- constructive feedback
- continuous learning.

Key Message 7

Professionalism must begin early and continue throughout a doctor's career

Professionalism should be reinforced throughout careers, rather than introduced only when concerns arise with professionalism viewed as a lifelong commitment that begins before specialist training and continues throughout a doctor's professional career.

The discussion highlighted the importance of embedding professionalism consistently across medical school, prevocational training, specialist training, continuing professional development and leadership roles. Rather than being taught as a single competency or revisited only when concerns arise, professionalism should be reinforced through education, supervision, leadership and ongoing reflection.

Participants also recognised that maintaining professionalism requires ongoing support as healthcare systems, community expectations and models of care continue to evolve.

Progressing a cross-college Professionalism Framework

Based on the workshop discussions, CPMC will now commence development of a cross-college Professionalism Framework.

The framework will:

- build upon existing work rather than duplicate it

- use the ANZCA *Supporting Professionalism and Performance* Guide as the principal reference model
- articulate shared principles and behavioural expectations for specialist medical practice
- promote positive workplace cultures
- promote leadership, reflective practice and psychologically safe workplaces
- recognise the influence of organisational and system factors on professional behaviour
- support prevention, coaching and early intervention
- focus on continuous improvement rather than only on misconduct.
- strengthen consistency across specialist medicine while respecting the autonomy of individual Colleges and existing regulatory processes.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the workshop. CPMC looks forward to continuing to work collaboratively with member Colleges and stakeholders to develop a cross-college Professionalism Framework that builds on existing strengths and reflects the collective insights from this workshop. Together, we have an opportunity to foster psychologically safe workplaces where doctors feel supported to speak up, learn and continuously improve, ultimately strengthening patient safety and quality of care.

Jodie Long
CEO
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