



The Royal Australasian
College of Physicians

Media Release

RACP unites health groups to fight gag on doctors

20 June, 2015

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians is one of thirteen peak health organisations who have released a [joint statement](#) calling for urgent amendments to the *Australian Border Force Act*.

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians President, Laureate Professor Nick Talley said the legislation gags healthcare professionals by threatening up to two years jail for sharing information about the health conditions of immigration detention centres.

“A doctor’s work is defined by examining evidence and recommending the best solution regardless of where this work takes place,” Professor Talley said.

“Threatening doctors with imprisonment is a direct attack on our ability to work for the health and protection of our patients.”

The health organisations are demanding the Federal Government amend the Act to ensure health professionals and contractors are free to speak in support of best practice care, and against harmful conditions or practices impacting detainees.

“Doctors must be free to advocate for aspects that prevent the well-documented and devastating harms immigration detention centres have on the health of children and adults seeking protection,” Professor Talley said.

“Refugees and asylum seekers have complex and unique needs as patients and yet this law stops health care professionals from fulfilling their duty of care.”

Professor Talley said reports and evidence from those working in detention centres has provided first-hand insight into the appalling conditions and health issues faced by detainees including skin conditions, vector-borne diseases, sepsis and mental health issues.

“It is inconceivable that the Government is trying to gag our ability to advocate for our patients’ healthcare - it is crucial these changes are passed immediately,” Professor Talley said.

“There is an expectation from the public that doctors will speak up about any conditions that are causing harm to their patients or denying them access to care,” Professor Talley said.

Today is National Refugee Day, a time to remember that each year, millions of people are forced to flee their home country to seek asylum for fear of being persecuted because of their race, religion, nationality, social background or their political opinions.

- The joint statement is co-signed by:
 - The Royal Australasian College of Physicians
 - The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners
 - The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists

- Australasian Society of Infectious Diseases
- Public Health Association of Australia
- Australasian College for Emergency Medicine
- Australian Psychological Society
- Australian Medical Students Association
- Australian College of Nursing
- Australian College of Midwives
- Australian College of Mental Health Nurses
- Australian Association of Social Workers

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About The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP): The RACP trains, educates and advocates on behalf of more than 14,950 physicians – often referred to as medical specialists – and 6,530 Trainee members across Australia and New Zealand. The College represents more than 34 medical specialties including paediatrics & child health, cardiology, respiratory medicine, neurology, oncology and public health medicine, occupational & environmental medicine, palliative medicine, sexual health medicine, rehabilitation medicine and addiction medicine. Beyond the drive for medical excellence, the RACP is committed to developing health and social policies which bring vital improvements to the wellbeing of patients. www.racp.edu.au