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# Creating healthcare cultures of safety & respect

22—23 April 2021

These virtual sessions will focus on creating a culture of safety and respect in the workplace, by facilitating an assembly of health leaders and culture change practitioners with a common goal of eliminating bullying, discrimination, harassment and incivility in healthcare.

Keynote Speakers

Prof Russell Mannion PhD, FRSA, FAcSS. University of Birmingham

Prof Gerald Hickson MD, FAAP. Vanderbilt University Medical Center



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# Cultural change and patient safety: a joint summit

Health practitioners across Australia, indeed the world, are working towards cultural change. But what is culture? How is it linked to patient safety? How does cultural change happen? And what can be achieved when it does?

The evidence linking respectful behaviour with patient safety is well established and continually increasing. But even with a shared commitment to professionalism, achieving cultural change is recognised as a challenge that takes time. After all, most health practitioners already do what they think is best for their patients, and many of us are inherently (and often subconsciously) resistant to change.

Five years ago, the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) committed to the Action Plan: Building Respect, Improving Patient Safety. Since then, calls for a safety culture have become louder and other leaders across the health sector have joined the chorus. In 2017, the Medical Board of Australia named 'collaborations to foster a positive culture of medicine' a cornerstone of professional performance.

Professor Russell Mannion and Professor Jerry Hickson are established leaders in the field of patient safety and cultural change, and both are keynote speakers at the summit RACS is hosting with Macquarie University, St Vincent's Health Australia and the Royal Australasian College of Medical Administrators. Recognising that collaboration is key, the summit aims to foster discussion and share expertise across the health sector to support constructive change.

Professor Mannion, who is an Honorary Professor with the Australian Institute of Health Innovation, has published extensively on culture in the health sector: what it is, what shapes it, how it is linked to quality and safety, and how changing it can improve care and performance. He refers to a demonstrated "consistent association

between positive organisational and workplace cultures and beneficial clinical outcomes, including reduced mortality rates across a variety of health settings".

Often, he argues, culture "is a metaphor for some of the softer, less visible aspects of health sector organisations and how these become manifest in patterns of care", less visible, but no less powerful in influencing patient outcomes. He thinks an under-nuanced understanding of what shapes and defines culture in health care can limit the impact of the link between culture and performance.

"Clearly, the relations between culture and quality, safety or efficiency are unlikely to be straightforward. Culture, although important, offers no magic bullet, and the challenge becomes one of understanding which components of culture might influence which aspects of performance," he said.

Professor Mannion has closely examined the importance of health sector employees speaking out and raising concerns when they see poor quality care or unsafe practice, in the interests of patient safety. He also recognises how complex this request can be given there is a "widely held perception among health professionals that they will be victimised, ostracised or bullied if they raise legitimate concerns about the work of colleagues or about poor care".

Professor Hickson is well known in the RACS community and has been an influential adviser as the College has strived to build a culture of respect in surgery. He consistently warns that the journey of cultural change is more marathon than sprint.

Values, he says, are a powerful driver in creating a culture of safety, partly because we all want alignment between what we do and what we believe.

"Culture has an impact on patient safety.

And culture represents our values, knowledge and experience in action, on behalf of the patients we serve," he said.

He encourages surgeons and other health practitioners involved in cultural change to start from shared values rather than focus on barriers to change. Fostering a culture in which people feel safe to speak up is at the heart of building a culture of respect.

Ask "what are our shared priorities and values, and how can we link these to strengthen our performance and make it safe for people to speak up," he said.

"In a 'safety culture', everyone feels respected and therefore able to work in an undistracted way. They can speak up when they see something that needs to be heard," Professor Hickson said.

He recognises that cultural change is not for the faint hearted and there is no single path that will get organisations to a new cultural destination swiftly.

"Change happens when an organisation is values-driven and has made a commitment to working together and making it easy for team members to do the right thing and voice concerns in a constructive way," he said. "Speaking up supports patient safety. We all work in teams; we all have different skills and abilities. When team members are all respected, nothing gets in the way of their performance." ■

*In April 2021, RACS is co-hosting a virtual summit on Creating Healthcare Cultures of Safety and Respect, featuring Professor Mannion and Professor Hickson. A joint initiative of RACS, Royal Australasian College of Medical Administrators, Australian Institute of Health Innovation at Macquarie University and St Vincent's Health Australia, the summit is open to people across the health sector working to achieve cultural change.*