

## Junior doctor disqualified after harassing colleague online



### Key messages from the case

Doctors' professional obligations include demonstrating respect to other healthcare professionals and behaving professionally and courteously to colleagues including when using social media. Harassment or abuse of colleagues by email, text or social media may be criminal offences as well as professional conduct issues and will have significant legal and professional consequences.

### Details of the decision

#### Professionalism – bullying and harassment

Dr L developed feelings for a colleague, Dr Y, but she said she did not feel the same way about him.

About six months later Dr Y began to receive harassing, abusive and threatening posts on her social media accounts and via text message to her personal mobile number. These came from fictitious accounts that were traced back to Dr L.

#### Communication – text and social media

Dr L pleaded guilty to criminal charges of using a carriage service to harass. A charge of stalking was withdrawn.

#### Outcome

Dr L's conduct constituted professional misconduct and was inconsistent with him being a fit and proper person to hold registration. The tribunal placed weight on the fact that the behaviour continued for 8 months and was not a one-off lapse in judgement. He had caused significant distress to Dr Y and publicly vilified her professionally and personally.

By the time of the hearing, Dr L had resigned from practice and forfeited his registration. He indicated he did not intend to reapply for registration.

Dr L was reprimanded and disqualified from reapplying for registration for 12 months.

### Key lessons

Your professional conduct obligations extend to your comments online. You must communicate respectfully and courteously with colleagues online as well as in person, and ensure your posts do not breach the Code of Conduct.

Online harassment or abuse may also be criminal offences as well as a breach of professional standards. Criminal convictions, or the charges themselves, can have an impact on a practitioner's suitability to hold registration..

Assume that any online content you share or post can be traced back to you. The content could potentially be accessed by a patient or coworker and this could have a significant impact on your professional reputation and standing.

## References and further reading

Avant factsheet – [Social media for doctors – keeping it professional](#)

Medical Board of Australia – [Good medical practice: a code of conduct for doctors in Australia](#)

Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency – [Social media: How to meet your obligations under the National Law \(ahpra.gov.au\)](#)

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