

## Media release

15 July 2025

### Mushroom case prompts doctor confidentiality warning

Avant Mutual, Australia's largest doctor-owned organisation, today reinforced strict patient confidentiality rules after a doctor was reported to regulators for publicly discussing details of the Erin Patterson mushroom killer case.

The doctor, who gave evidence in court during Patterson's trial, spoke to national and international media outlets about his experience treating Patterson, shared details of his clinical interactions and his blunt personal impressions of her behaviour.

Regulators have now reportedly received numerous complaints following the media interviews, highlighting the complex professional obligations doctors faced when involved with high profile patients, even when aspects of a case were in the public domain.

"We understand being involved in high-profile cases can be deeply stressful and traumatic for doctors," Avant General Manager of Advocacy, Education and Research, Georgie Haysom said.

"This case presents an important reminder for our doctors about the boundaries of patient confidentiality and professional conduct, particularly when dealing with exceptional situations that can be emotionally challenging.

"While doctors may be compelled to give evidence in court, which provides legal protection for necessary disclosures, those same protections do not extend to voluntary media interviews," she said.

Avant emphasised doctors have strict duties of confidentiality and obligations under privacy legislation to protect patient information and can only release information in limited circumstances where required or permitted by law.

"Even when giving factual evidence in court as a treating doctor, doctors should limit themselves to factual, objective information rather than personal opinions or character assessments," Ms Haysom said.

"We recognise being involved in court proceedings can have a significant emotional impact. However, once a doctor steps outside the courtroom, their full professional obligations around confidentiality resume."

Ms Haysom said discussing evidence during a media interview was not covered by the same legal safeguards that applied in court, and doctors who believed they were only sharing information already in the public domain still risked breaching patient confidentiality or being found to have acted unprofessionally.

"We encourage any practitioner facing media attention to contact their medical defence organisation for guidance before responding," Ms Haysom said.

"Our role is to support doctors through these challenging situations while helping them understand their professional obligations.

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"Doctors are only human and can understandably react emotionally in traumatic cases, but breaching patient confidentiality can lead to serious disciplinary consequences..

"The Medical Board's Code of Conduct requires doctors to treat patients with respect and compassion, maintain patients' privacy and confidentiality, and consider how their public comments may affect public trust in the medical profession.

"We understand these are challenging situations, and we're here to help practitioners navigate them appropriately and professionally," Ms Haysom said.

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## About Avant

Avant Mutual is a member-owned doctors' organisation and Australia's largest medical indemnity insurer, committed to supporting a sustainable health system that provides quality care to the Australian community. Our 90,000 members (more than half of Australia's doctors) are from all medical specialties and career stages and from every state and territory. Our products and services in the areas of insurance, lending, health and legal and practice management are all designed to support doctors in their professional and personal lives.

For further information, please visit [www.avant.org.au](http://www.avant.org.au)

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