The latest statistics show Australians spend around $1 billion on cosmetic surgical and medical-related treatments each year. Suffice it to say, cosmetic surgery is more popular than ever before and it has never been so important to ensure Australian patients are receiving the best possible treatment at the hands of their physicians.

With patient care foremost in its priorities, practice and philosophy, the Australasian College of Cosmetic Surgeons (ACCS) plays an essential role in regulating and upholding the standards of cosmetic surgery in Australia.

By ensuring the provision of premium quality, consistent safety and optimum patient care in cosmetic procedures, the ACCS signifies one of the major pillars in securing the healthiness of the Australian industry. Sydney-based Dr Russell Knudsen says the ACCS plays a leading role in the Australian cosmetic surgery arena.

‘ACCS is a leader among the groups that monitor and regulate cosmetic surgery practice in Australia,’ he says. ‘It sets the benchmark for cosmetic medical practice as a separate medical specialty.

Training and accreditation

Since its inception in 1999, the aim of the ACCS has been consistently clear: to ensure the safe delivery of cosmetic surgery and non-surgical procedures to the Australian community. That appropriately trained and qualified medical practitioners perform these procedures is paramount, and the ACCS offers formal training and accreditation to its members. ‘The ACCS provides comprehensive general training programs for all members and rigorous, two-year registrar programs for physician applicants who wish to sit the ACCS Fellowship Exam,’ says Dr Knudsen. ‘The Fellowship Exam is the only cosmetic surgery-specific exam available in Australia.’

The ACCS plays a key role in ensuring those who practice cosmetic medicine are sufficiently trained. Indeed, to become a Fellow of the ACCS, doctors must complete a minimum of 12 years medical and surgical training.

‘To be recognised as a fellow of the ACCS, doctors need to have undergone appropriate training, pass specific procedural training and they must also have demonstrated substantial clinical experience,’ says Dr John Flynn, past-president of the ACCS. ‘We also ensure our fellows are participating in continuing education and, where needed, re-certification.’

Importantly, the ACCS facilitates ongoing education and auditing for all its existing members. ‘This ensures the established standards are maintained on a long-term basis,’ says Dr Knudsen. ‘All members must re-certify each year and this involves annual attainment of strict continuing education criteria, for example scientific meetings, publications, etc.’

‘In addition, procedural audits of medical practitioners afford another level of monitoring standards of practice.’

Alongside training, the ACCS has a Code of Practice that covers, among other things, advertising and promotional guidelines and informed consent regulations.

Patient peace of mind

Currently, the ACCS is a voluntary scheme for doctors, but signifies a beacon of reassurance for patients hoping to receive monitored and regulated care in undertaking cosmetic surgery. This is seen in the ACCS Seal of Approval, which can be displayed by any member who complies with the College’s Code of Practice.

According to ACCS past-president Dr Colin Moore, the aim of this seal is to protect both practitioners and patients. He sees it as an objective accreditation that empowers patients to make informed decisions and protects practitioners by increasing the transparency of their practice.

Furtheing this commitment to patient and physician protection, the ACCS has recently applied to the Australian Medical Council (AMC) to have Cosmetic Medical Practice recognised as a ‘medical specialty’.

This would mean any organisation or training facility in the country could apply to have their training scheme assessed against the requirements established by the AMC – affording greater clarity for both patients and physicians in making decisions to undertake, or become involved with, cosmetic surgery in Australia.

Looking forward

With cosmetic surgery more popular than ever before – and showing no signs of slowing down – it is imperative Australians have access to transparent, professional and regulated information in decision-making.

‘The ACCS provides the guidelines, and sets the standards, for cosmetic surgery practice in Australia and protects practitioners by increasing the transparency of our fellows are participating in continuing education and, where needed, re-certification.’

Looking forward, Dr Knudsen explains the ACCS will play a central role in ensuring cosmetic surgery remains a strong, reputable and reliable field in Australia.

‘The ACCS will continue to be a critical part of the ongoing setting of standards and maintenance of safe practice,’ Dr Knudsen says. ‘To this end, the College, is also in regular contact with other stakeholders and particularly with the government.’

Encouragement of practitioners to sit examinations, time-limiting the accreditations available by examination, and annual requirements for proof of satisfactory continuing medical education, will ensure industry standards are both raised and maintained in the years to come,’ Dr Knudsen concludes.