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**Transcript:** AMA President, Dr Michael Gannon, ABC Radio Perth, Mornings, 4 August 2017

**Subject:** Doctors' Health

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**GEOFF HUTCHISON:** I'm going to go to Dr Michael Gannon, who is the National President of the AMA. Michael, good morning to you.

**MICHAEL GANNON:** Good morning, Geoff.

**GEOFF HUTCHISON:** We're talking to you today not in the context of these blokes who are working in what is sort of broadly called blue-collar areas, but these statistics also talk about white collar workers and the jobs that are causing the kinds of great strain, and it's probably no surprise to you that those who increasingly spend their time dealing with our mental health issues are most likely to have problems with their own.

**MICHAEL GANNON:** Yeah, that's certainly the case, and we're very keenly aware of doctors' health issues, and specifically suicide. It's long been known that doctors and dentists have the highest suicide rates amongst professionals, and it's perhaps been incorrectly asserted that's because – or purely because – they've got the access to the tools to achieve it. Certainly, doctors and dentists have got the drugs and they've got the knowledge to sadly succeed, but that doesn't mean that the pressures on doctors – both doctors in training and doctors in practice – aren't substantial, and we're trying to shine a light on it.

**GEOFF HUTCHISON:** One thing that's occurred to me, Michael, I've met doctors who are very skilled at compartmentalising the day to day; I've also met doctors who have told me that the cumulative impact of dealing with sickness and sadness really takes its toll. So if I'm a doctor in Western Australia – because Western Australia has been held up as something of a model here – who can I go to say I'm feeling depressed, I'm anxious, I may even have suicidal thoughts, without thinking this terrible professional consequence?

**MICHAEL GANNON:** What you're referring to there is that- it was actually the AMA in Western Australia who were successful in achieving a change to the law for doctors in Western Australia, which doesn't exist anywhere else in the country. I'm pleased to report that the Federal Health Minister Greg Hunt is at a COAG meeting in Brisbane today, imploring the State Ministers elsewhere to try and introduce these changes. Very simply, there's not a requirement for mandatory reporting for a treating doctor in Western Australia. And the reason this is so important is not that the law is that differently written, but there is a perception amongst doctors out there that there is a barrier to career progression if you do seek help. We would tell our patients, seek help early, and yet the reality is that doctors in the other seven jurisdictions in Australia, many of them fear the career consequences of asking for help, end up more impaired, and therefore creating a greater danger to their patients.

**GEOFF HUTCHISON:** Is there any professional pushback here that says, well, yes we know you've got problems and we know we should be talking about this openly, as we ask our patients to talk about it openly, but there are things at stake here that we don't want to give up? You know, we don't want doctors declared unreliable or some kind of a risk to others because of the nature of the work they do?

**MICHAEL GANNON:** Well, all doctors are patients and all doctors become patients eventually. And their jobs are important, so the impairment of a medical practitioner might

have a greater consequence than the impairment of someone else in the community. They're entitled to confidentiality. In the past 12 months, the AMA Federally has seen the completion of a roll-out across the country of really robust doctors' health advisory services. We're very proud of that and that's so important. Healthy doctors take better care of their patients.

**GEOFF HUTCHISON:** Thank you very much for talking to us. Michael Gannon Federal President of the AMA.

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