

8/8/2011

I am writing to **oppose the changes to the "Better Access Scheme"** as a 'mental health consumer': Someone who has suffered depression and anxiety disorders since childhood.

I have suffered in silence and have had my life (and those of my family) severely impacted by my mental illness over the years of living with untreated symptoms. It has been hard at times to manage activities of daily living, let alone keep down a constant job and parent young children.

In the few years following birth of babies my condition got worse and it was not picked up or recognised by either nurses or doctors to whose care I was seeking. Later after the inevitable divorce, I suffered a complete breakdown and attempted to take my life. I was very, very, ill and was treated my heavy medication under the care of a lovely GP.

However it was not until five years later when a friend noticed that my state of mind was similar to that just prior to the suicide attempt (and I was feeling terribly suicidal) that she took me back to my doctor for further treatment and this time, because of the 'Better Access' programme, I had access to proper care from a extremely competent Clinical Psychologist.

I had to give up work to focus on recovery, and needed the eighteen sessions offered under the 'scheme' for the past two years. My Clinical Psychologist also recognised that my symptomology was so severe that I needed further intervention, so together with my GP referred me to a psychiatrist who medicated and hospitalised me for a short time while the medication was being 'worked out'. The psychiatrist told me his job was to make sure my medications were working and I am hospitalised when needed, the necessary psychotherapy was to be continued by my own competent Clinical Psychologist. He did however refer me to a two-week intensive outpatient CBT programme that was run by an Occupational Therapist followed by a few individual follow-up sessions with this professional.

In short recovery has been slow, yet it has occurred with the help of a team of professionals AND access to these professionals through the Better Access Scheme. I am a single mother on very little income, so treatment outside this scheme would have been impossible.

Now I am vastly improved and although I have bumps in my mental health I am not always suffering. At present I am about to re-join the workforce, my children have a mother who is functioning, and so they are doing much better in their lives too, and I am having better relationships with those around me – family and friends and with my new partner.

Living with a mental illness is a huge debilitating handicap in ones life and taking away Medicare funding for treatment is as cruel as not funding chemotherapy for cancer sufferers. Both conditions cause debility and death. Mental illness however has far reaching effects on the individual and weaving out into the community. Proper funding through Better Access to 12-18 sessions under a psychologist's care is money saved in the bigger picture considering the larger damaging cost of mental health left untreated. I will continue to need this level of care for some time yet, to keep on-track through this long bumpy road of recovery.

Regards,