

Henry Briffa
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To the Finance and Public Administration References Committee for inquiry and report by 13 May 2011.

Re APHRA and the Psychology Board of Australia

I am a Counselling Psychologist who has been provided with an Endorsement by APHRA and the Psychology Registration Board of Australia. I wish to express my concerns with respect of the Endorsement of Psychologists under the new registration guidelines, and the relationship between Medicare service provision guidelines for Psychologists and the APHRA Endorsement categories for Psychologists.

My reading of the Psychologist Endorsement guidelines is that Counselling Psychologists have specific Endorsement as they are viewed to have particular skills in the provision of 'therapy'. Clinical Psychologists are Endorsed as they have specific skills in the 'diagnosis and treatment of mental disorders'. However when I read the Medicare service provision guidelines, Clinical Psychologists are viewed as being an exclusive group of Psychologists and the only group viewed to be

competent in the provision of 'therapy'. Within the Medicare service provision guidelines Counselling Psychologists are awarded with lower rebates and viewed to be only capable of providing 'focused strategies'. I would suggest that there needs to be greater consistency between the Endorsement guidelines and the Medicare Service Provision guidelines; that if Counselling Psychologists are the group of Psychologists who are the more skilled in the provision of 'therapy', they should be recognised by Medicare as being able to provide 'therapy' and 'therapy' should not be the exclusive domain of the Clinical Psychologist as it presently is within the Medicare guidelines. If any group of Psychologists has specific expertise in 'therapy', surely it is Counselling Psychologists. Counselling Psychologists also undertake more training in therapy within their university training and commonly undertake additional psychotherapy training within specialised Schools of psychotherapy that are not formal academic institutes.

Further to this, Counselling Psychologists are required under the Medicare guidelines to provide a training plan to the Australian Psychological Society (APS) in order to continue to be viewed as having an appropriate skill base from which to provide 'focused strategies'. The requirements of this training plan are somewhat unclear (despite my attempts to obtain clarification from the APS) but it would seem that Counselling Psychologists are requested to undergo training to be able to improve their skill base in the provision of 'focused strategies'. It would seem more relevant, respectful and more pertinent that Counselling Psychologists be requested to undertake additional training in the provision of 'therapy' and that their expertise in the provision of 'therapy' is their particular contribution to the people of Australia.

"Therapy", that is psychotherapy, has an established evidence base and has been shown to be effective in the prevention and treatment of mental illness.

I recommend that to remedy the above-mentioned inconsistencies, the Medicare guidelines now need to be amended in order to be more consistent with the new Psychological Registration Board Guidelines for Endorsement. Failure to do so makes a mockery of the Psychologist Endorsement categories.

Yours faithfully

Henry Briffa

Counselling Psychologist