

27 July, 2011

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to express my concern and disappointment of the two-tier Medicare rebate system. It is important that this issue is addressed now to ensure that very highly experienced, qualified and effective psychologists do not leave the Psychology profession.

The Australian Psychological Society (APS) promoted higher Medicare rebates for Members of the Clinical Board for services identical to those delivered by registered psychologists. This presupposes that individuals who have completed a Masters of Clinical Psychology deliver a more effective treatment than those who have not completed that course. It also assumes that a recent graduates of such a training program are more proficient than a psychologist who may have decades more experience. This is an absurd and erroneous assumption.

If a distinction is truly to be made between Clinical Psychologists and Registered Psychologists then surely the APS must prove that Clinical Psychologists must "do" something differently than Registered Psychologists that somehow warrants them to attract a higher rebate. So far I have not seen any such justification. I would request of the APS to examine the literature that states that effective psychotherapy is attributable to the establishment of a working therapeutic relationship and other factors, often more than to particular theories or techniques.

Furthermore, if there is a clear distinction between the function of a Clinical Psychologist and a Psychologist then the APS must make recommendations to the Department of Health and Ageing to make separate Item numbers available that would reflect the different activities of both types of psychologists. Or to make a distinction of different Item numbers for different DSM categories that Clinical Psychologists can manage that Psychologists cannot.

I have been involved in the field of psychology for 30 years and I have had a widely diverse career. Upon completion of my Honours degree from La Trobe University I sought to undergo a 2 year supervision program. At that time, the Clinical Masters program was focussed on working with people with mental illness in hospital or community settings. This was not what I wanted. I wanted to become proficient as a psychologist for those who were not necessarily classified as having a mental illness but were wanting to have happier lives. Of course, this also included those who were suffering from anxiety and depression and other disorders that didn't necessarily attract a DSM diagnosis at that time. Please note that this type of client is similar to those I still see in my private practice and who are subsidised by Medicare.

Recently I considered undertaking a Doctorate of Clinical Psychology. I enquired whether I would get Recognised Prior Learning credits for my psychology experience. I

was told that would not be possible. I would be forced to do placements in workplaces similar to where I have been previously employed and where I would have supervised intern psychologists myself. I estimate that in my work as a psychologist over the years that I would have completed at least 23,000 clinical hours with clients, yet I would be made to complete supervised placements with a supervisor who would probably have significantly less experience than myself.

I would strongly request that the Senate takes immediate action in the following ways-

- To abolish the distinction between Clinical Psychologists and Psychologists and to suggest to the Government that all Psychologists have the same Medicare Item numbers applied to their services, OR:
- To clarify the relevance of the distinction between Clinical Psychologists and Psychologists and to then to suggest to the Government different Medicare Item numbers that would reflect that distinction, OR:
- If the above is not possible the APS must place pressure on the Clinical Board to review their entrance requirements for psychologists who have extensive counselling and clinical experience.
- The APS should also ensure that Clinical Masters and Doctoral programs are made relevant to mature and experienced psychologists by allowing for Recognised Prior Learning.

Heather Marriott BBSC Hons MAPS  
Registered Psychologist