

Inquiry into Commonwealth Funding and Administration of Mental Health Services

1 I am concerned about the current two tiered rebate for psychologists under Medicare.

The recently released review of the Better Access to Mental Health Programme shows that the services provided to clients by “generalist” psychologists are as equally effective as those provided by psychologists deemed to be “specialist psychologists” i.e. clinical psychologists.

This is not surprising to those of us deemed “generalist” psychologists, as many of us have multiple higher degrees, years of continued professional development, training and supervision, and work experience with the very group that presents under this programme. The government and public have been misled to believe that only clinical psychologists have the skills and experience to deal with the client group targeted by this initiative.

This two- tier system has made it a lot harder for ‘generalist psychologists’ to compete in the marketplace and maintain their livelihoods.

There is no reasonable basis for making such a generalised claim of superiority of clinical psychologists over other psychologists.

I hope that the evidence from this research will allow you to review this unfair two-tier rebate scheme in favour of a more equitable scheme, that recognises the highly effective skills held by psychologists with psychology degrees other than a clinical degree, who can offer an appropriate and effective professional psychology service to members of the public struggling with psychological pain

2 I am concerned that the two tiered system and the descriptor of Focused Psychological Strategies under Medicare is now being used by some as a way of defining the capability of “generalist” psychologists.

Counselling Psychologists are in fact the psychology specialty that deals with providing **therapy** to the out-patient clients experiencing depression, anxiety and stress in response to personal and work-related stresses and life crises that are most likely to be referred under the “Better Access” initiative.

We are an endorsed specialty under the Psychology Board of Australia, with extensive training and experience in providing **therapy** to clients experiencing psychological problems and mental health issues. To say that we are only qualified to provide psychological strategies is a gross misrepresentation and understatement of the assistance that we are highly trained and experienced to provide to our clients. To say that only clinical psychologists can provide therapy when many other higher degrees train psychologists as experts in providing therapy is unfairly favouring one masters degree over many other very relevant and effective higher psychology study pathways.

I have two masters degrees in psychology, the second in counselling psychology. I have worked as a psychologist for 20 years in a counselling role and have had extensive training and supervision in the assessment and treatment of depression, anxiety disorders, substance abuse and other high prevalence behavioural issues.

To suggest that I am only qualified to provide focused psychological strategies under this programme is allowing me to use only a part of what I have learned over so many years. And in reality, this is exactly what is happening in the field, as this arbitrary two tier categorisation relegates generalist psychologists to a second class status, and our skill set is defined by the FPS descriptor.

There are also many other psychologists who hold other higher degrees and extensive training that may not be a member of the Australian Psychological Society or part of a College, that are absolutely capable of providing much more therapeutically to their clients than focussed psychological strategies.

3 *I am concerned that the reduction of sessions available to clients under the Better Access Programme will compromise the effectiveness of many psychological interventions.*

It is my experience when seeing clients referred under the Better Access Programme that they will often require 12 sessions to effectively assess, implement and consolidate an effective behavioural change process.

The proposed reduction will mean that many clients will end their psychological intervention prematurely and therefore the ability for psychologists to be effective with many clients will be compromised.

Yours Faithfully

Patruca Wright
Counselling Psychologist

BA, MA (Psych), MA (Couns), MAPS