

2011-07-22.

I would like to address the following terms of reference for the senate inquiry on the Commonwealth Funding and Administration of Mental Health Services.

Term of Reference (b iv): The impact of changes to the number of allied mental health treatment services for patients with mild or moderate mental illness under the Medicare Benefits Schedule.

Recently I was referred to my clinical psychologist Dr David Collins by my GP, Dr. Kevin Tan who was aware I had suffered from depression and anxiety for some years. Previous to this my long term Doctor Rees McCarthy, had referred me to counsellors and psychologists over a number of years but I had shown no signs of improvement.

When I first met Dr.Collins I was desperate and tired of life and my inability to make changes. In fact I didn't believe that Dr. Collins or anyone one else could help me. I was told that I only had twelve sessions to recover and become a new person which for me was going to be a miracle if it could happen.

This piece of information made me feel nervous. I asked myself how can I change in twelve sessions a lifetime of negative thinking and traumatic experiences. But I had no choice but to try. Unlike my previous psychologists Dr. Collins promised he would never give up on me and I believed him.

As our meetings progressed I experienced ups and downs, there were times I felt this is not working and times when I felt it was working. But in the back of my mine all I could think about was that I was running out of sessions. This caused me to experience great stress and anxiety. I knew that I had made some improvement but I thought if my sessions stop now I would be so distraught and would feel that it had been a total waste of time as I would not have achieved anything.

I expressed these feelings to Dr. Collins and was relieved to be told that in cases like mine there was an opportunity to apply for an additional six sessions. When I was told this in relief I cried with happiness. I couldn't believe it I had nearly given up, was there hope for me to get well.

If my sessions had stopped after only twelve sessions I would have regressed and been worse off than if I had never started the counselling.

Now I hear that the government is considering reducing the twelve sessions to ten as a maximum with no additional sessions after this period. If I had had only ten sessions available for myself I would have made no advance and in fact gone backwards, I would have been distraught and extremely depressed.

My experience is that ten sessions is far too insufficient to resolve issues of a lifetime. I believe that to deny individual the chance to get better and expect them to change in a specified period is naive and immature. I implore you to allow the current situation to remain as it is because you are dealing with peoples mental and emotional health. Ten sessions is a waste of time and would do more damage than help the individual. This is my personal experience.

Term of Reference (e i): The two-tiered Medicare rebate system for psychologists.

When I first was referred to my clinical psychologist my biggest concern was whether I could afford the sessions which my GP had recommended. I was unemployed on benefits, renting and had been out of work for nearly two years because of illness. In my mind there was no way I could afford one session let alone twelve.

My doctor had informed me that there was a rebate of \$120 per session and that I be out of pocket about \$20 per session. I knew I could afford this, so I was extremely relieved, even though it was difficult for me to find the money to pay for the session before I could claim from Medicare.

Even though the cost per visit was around \$140 I knew that the rebate existed and was not that concerned.

However when my clinical psychologist told me that the Government was on the verge of reducing the medicare rebate to only \$80 per session I immediately panicked. I knew that there was no way I could afford to be out of pocket by \$60 per month. If this was the situation before I had started seeing my psychologist I would never have started the sessions. Therefore I would have missed out on vital medical and psychological care which for me is an abhorrent thought.

I understand that there are two levels of rebate: \$120 for clinical psychologist and \$80 for psychologists.

Dr.Collins is a Clinical Psychologist who holds a PHD in Psychology. He has worked very hard to achieve his qualifications. As such he deserves to be able to charge a fee higher than normal psychologists who only have an honours degree.

Because they are more qualified they are more likely to be able to help clients improve their lives. This is what Dr.Collins has done for me and others.

So I believe that the current system is fair and should be maintained.

No previous psychologist was ever able to help me all gave up on me but never Dr. Collins.

So if rebates were reduced to only \$80 he would not have been able to offer me his services because he cannot afford to reduce his price as a professional and I could not afford to pay for his payments without the \$120 medicare rebate.

So please allow things to remain as they are as I cannot afford these payments on my own nor can I afford not to be treated by someone with the compassion and experience of Dr. David Collins.