

for consideration:

Changes to the GP Mental Health services from 12 to 18 sessions to strictly 10 sessions is unfair to people diagnosed with mental illness. As a successful private practitioner and I say this as I work full time in my own practice, which according to the APS only 2-5% of all registered psychologists work full time in the field.

My clients are from all levels of socioeconomic backgrounds, with varying degrees of mental illness. Clients present with bi-polar, schizophrenia, Major depression, Borderline Personality Disorders, Disabilities, ie degenerative muscle conditions to autism/asperger's, GAD, OCD, eating disorders etc.

Most of my clients that present do not always require 12 sessions however, there are a small number who do require the 18 sessions. This small percentage would include people with bi-polar and Major depressive episodes, Acquired Brain Injury, BPD. As a private practitioner I can and do offer after hours appointments so that people can maintain their employment. Some of the clients I see would not engage the services from a public system due to limited hours, staff turn over, stringent timelines to name some of the barriers faced. Unfortunately, people who enter the public system often feel stigmatised by society; at least by being able to access private practices the clients are able to maintain some anonymity. The benefits are fewer hospital admissions and access to a flexible service by highly skilled and passionate practitioners.

The two-tiered Medicare rebate system for psychologists is discriminatory in the fact that the very organisation which reports to represents us, ie APS, has failed the majority of its members miserably. I am a member of the APS and have over 22 years of experience working in the human services field, such as family services, disability, education, and community health sectors. However, not always as a fully registered psychologist, the APS does not recognise work no matter how involved or what your role was in the human services sector prior to being a psychologist. In my 22 years of experience of working in the human services sector I always provided counselling and support to my clients. I am a generalist psychologist and worked as a single mother of three children, I put myself through university and did the 4 + 2 pathway. I received very good supervision and a wealth of work experience much greater than any Masters Program could ever provide. I do assess, diagnose and treat clients. I also have a good rapport with Psychiatrist, General Practitioners and other services in the area. I am disappointed that some psychologists believe that they have superior skills. This small group of psychologists have grandiose ideation in relation to their own abilities.

As a generalist I also practice CBT and have done so for at least 20 years with the people I worked with, even though I have only been fully registered for 8 years. I have a wealth of experience with the culturally and diverse communities, worked 9 1/2 years in the disability field, and have gained extensive knowledge and experience in working with people with special needs. I try and provide the best service to people who present to my practice and continually attend workshops and supervision beyond what is the requirement of our profession.

To change the available sessions to only 10 per year would have a negative impact on people with mental illness, as there is a workforce shortage of psychologists to meet the demand currently this action may also deter psychologists from remaining in the field and other potential psychologists from ever entering into the sector. As for myself, I have attempted to upgrade my qualifications but due to the limited places in universities available and most only want full time students I found it nearly impossible to return to uni. In addition to the cost and burden this would have on my own family. I also do not believe that returning to University would enhance my knowledge or benefit the community whom I treat. In other words I do not believe the community would gain a significant benefit from any further formal studies that I undertook. Also when I completed my studies the 4years + 2years it was deemed to be the equivalent of a Masters.

I find it also offensive that psychologists who believe that they are superior do so without any evidence to support their statements. As a generalist I am required to write many court reports and at times also have to attend. If I was not qualified to do so, what is that saying in relation to Magistrates, Judges, Solicitors, etc. The two-tiered system needs to be dismantled and according to the regulations that govern our status, the term specialist such as clinical or counselling psychologist was removed and no matter what pathway you studied in the end we were all registered psychologists.

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Psychologist (unendorsed).