

### **The two-tiered system**

Clinical Psychology is a general practice and health service provider specialty in professional psychology. Clinical psychologists assess, diagnose, predict, prevent, and treat psychopathology, mental disorders and other individual or group problems to improve behavior adjustment, adaptation, personal effectiveness and satisfaction. It is the only specialization that requires students to undertake at least 6 years of training, which includes a strong focus on clinical skills. The last two years (three, if completing a DPsych, four if completing a PhD) of training provides psychologists with the ability to develop further clinical skills, which no other profession does. There is a strong focus on psychotherapy and treatments that have been shown to work and to be effective with clients.

I have had the opportunity to work with both general and clinical psychologists. I realize that within the profession there has been division between the two, long before the 2-tiered system was introduced and this system is a reflection on the training the Clinical Psychologists undergo. Clinical Psychologists realize that they have further training and this does need to be recognized in all sectors. Some workplaces will pay more to hire a Clinical Psychologist over a generalist psychologist, purely based on their Clinical expertise. Clinical Psychologists have experience in assessment and diagnosis of mild to severe presentations. They are also highly experienced in research allowing the critical evaluation and analysis of research and the ability to further develop assessments and treatments.

The Psychology Board of Australia, which has recently become part of the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency recognizes the difference between specialties of psychologists and the amount of training that goes into this. We have seen the introduction of the "endorsement" which the Psychology Board gives to those psychologists who have completed specialist training. If the government does not recognize the differences between the Clinical Psychologists and General Psychologists then less clinicians will engage in further training which will lead to a skills shortage.

Those that complete less training (four years and two years of training) do not go through the same rigorous training regimes that Clinical psychologists do. There are many psychologists out there that do not agree with the two tiered system, however, the APS has allowed them to complete further training to become qualified Clinical Psychologists. The psychology profession needs to be protected to be able to provide these specialist services to those in the population that require it.

The general psychologists complain because they want the higher rebate. The APS is very clear, if they want to be able to charge more for services provided, then complete further training.

### **The reduction in allowed services**

The government's proposed reduction in the number of allocated services per calendar year through Medicare is going to really affect the management of people with mild to severe mental illness.

I work in a disadvantaged community where people cannot access psychological services. The community mental health has a waiting list and once a client is deemed to have recovered they are discharged. There is rarely the option of follow up or booster sessions. This scheme allows clients that have mild to very severe disorders to access up to 18 sessions a year (under extenuating circumstances) and for the majority of client I have seen 12 is enough. However, the cut back to 1 a year will significantly impact most on those who cannot afford the service, but require it the most. I do not charge my clients a gap fee, as they cannot afford it. I believe that everyone in the community does deserve a chance to receive quality mental health services.