

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

9th August 2011

Re: the two-tiered Medicare rebate system for psychologists

As a Provisional Psychologist undertaking a clinical masters degree, I am writing to voice my support to maintain the two-tier Medicare rebate system for psychologists, as I believe a system that recognises the advanced skills of tertiary qualified clinical psychologists will ultimately lead to the betterment of the profession as a whole. As a provisional psychologist undertaking a clinical masters, I clearly have an interest in this debate, however as outlined below, a two-tiered system benefits the profession, but also allows for transparent information regarding training and therefore enables choice by consumers. I outline my reasons below:

- University based training is assessed and competency judged over 2-3 years within university standards (Academic performance and practical capacity in the workplace). Graduates receive supervision from a range of supervisors across a variety of settings before they are deemed competent to practice. Learning is monitored throughout the degree and is not commensurate with a 4+2 trainee.
- The 4+2 scheme involves a paid supervisory arrangement; competency assessment is left to an agreement between supervisor and trainee (involving a dual relationship). This may therefore compromise the capacity of a supervisor to instigate remedial action if an individual is not performing to standard.
- University graduates become specialists with specialist skills rather than general skills.
- No other health profession is homogenised into a single tier. For example, a GP and a surgeon with specialist skills are both medical professionals, but cannot be classed within the same bracket. Classifying postgraduate qualified psychologists as having the same skills as psychologists with an honours level qualification makes a mockery of university-based training programs, and is a disincentive for individuals to undertake such a program.
- Entry to University postgraduate programs requires very high academic performance, which is selected on merit. To complete four years of undergraduate study and then commence postgraduate training requires dedication to the profession – the charge that postgraduate study creates an elitist profession is false as most postgraduate trainees are also forced to work during their training.
- When compared to 4+2 trained psychologists, university trained graduates with specialised clinical skills have the capacity to work with the whole spectrum of presentations from mild, moderate to severe. More hours of training in psychopathology, pharmacology and advanced clinical interventions means graduates are expected to be and are capable of working with chronic and complex clients with high levels of co-morbidity.
- It is important to maintain a two-tiered system because clinical psychologists deserve to

be remunerated for higher levels of skill, as per any other profession.

- Most importantly, under a single rebate system, consumers are unable to differentiate between a psychologist with postgraduate qualifications and higher level skills and a psychologist who has undertaken a 4+2 pathway. Maintaining the two tiered system offers consumers the opportunity to choose a psychologist with their preferred skill level according to the consumers presenting concerns.

I trust that my feedback will be given due consideration.

Yours sincerely,