

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
P.O. Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

31st August 2011

Dear Committee,

Re: Commonwealth Funding - Two Tiered Medicare Rebate System for
Psychologists

I am writing both as an individual Psychologist in Private Practice as well as a member of the College of Counselling Psychologists. I work as a Counselling Psychologist in a Medical Practice at the Surrey Hills Medical Centre in Melbourne. The patients that are referred to me by a number of GP's range from moderate to severe mental disorders. I have achieved clinically significant outcomes in all areas of mental health disorders utilising effective assessment, diagnosis and evidence based treatment of all patients. I work extremely closely with the GP's especially in the areas of psychopathology and I am responsible for recommendations of treatments including medications and psychotherapeutic strategies. The patients include individuals, couples, families, adolescents and children.

My concerns are that the proposed reduction in the number of sessions available for GP referred Mental Health Care Plans will severely affect my ability to achieve the successful outcomes I have maintained. The patients suffering with severe mental disorders are unlikely to achieve the changes required to stabilise their mental health as well as sustain those changes, in the proposed 10 sessions. The research is borne out in my practice where shifts in brain neuronal pathways require strong psychotherapeutic reinforcement over a long period of time in order to maintain those changes. If therapy is concluded too early it is likely to result in the failure of clinically significant outcomes.

I do not believe that the title of Clinical Psychologist reflects a difference in the treatment of severe mental disorders from my work as a specialist Counselling Psychologist. I am always challenged in my practice as I cannot justify why our patients are not able to claim an equitable medicare rebate, especially as I have trained extensively over 15 years in evidence based psychological therapies. I am competent in assessment, diagnosis and recommend extremely successful treatment options for our patients. This is discriminatory with no justification.

I would be very grateful if you would give this submission your urgent attention.

Yours Sincerely,

SHARON MARCUS