

Hi

I am making this submission to the Senate inquiry on the administration of health practitioner registration by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA).

I am a provisionally registered psychologist, and, all going well, I will be fully registered by the end of this year.

I am very concerned by AHPRA's new "endorsed" and "unendorsed" categories for psychologists. There are already signs that this categorisation system is causing major problems for psychologists like me who will be regarded as unendorsed. There is anecdotal evidence (as provided by the Australian Association of Psychologists) that some insurance providers will only deal with psychologists that are categorised as endorsed.

To understand what is happening in the psychology profession, you need to some background on the training that is required before you can become registered. There are currently two pathways:

1. A 4 year degree + two years of closely supervised and regulated practice, which includes compliance with AHPRA's onerous guidelines, and 6 monthly reports to provide evidence that you are meeting the requirements.
2. A 6 year degree.

Many in the profession believe that the 4+2 model provides more practical experience and a more practical, and relevant pathway to becoming a psychologist. Practical experience is obviously important. The vast majority of psychologists have taken this pathway. When you think about the training, 4 years of study and 2 years of closely monitored supervision, this is a pretty solid foundation for a profession, comparable to that of a physiotherapist, chiropractor, osteopath, podiatrist, etc.

The current problem with our profession is a political one that has been largely created by the Australian Psychological Society (APS), which is supposed to represent psychologists like me. Instead, the APS has sold us out, at the expense of those who have completed 6 year degrees. To my knowledge this has not happened to any of the other allied professions.

The Australian Psychological Society (APS), which has a virtual monopoly over the profession (apart from the growing number of disenfranchised psychologists who have joined the newly formed Australian Association of Psychologists), appears to have been advocating on behalf of those psychologists who have completed at least a 6 year degree, despite the majority of their members not having taken that pathway to becoming a psychologist. How's that for representation? I believe that as a result of the APS's board and management structure being dominated by academics who work in universities, not by practitioners, it has advocated to the Australian Government on behalf of those who have completed a 6 year degree, rather than the 4 year degree, with 2 practical years of experience. As a result AHPRA now has two categories of psychologists: endorsed and unendorsed.

Correspondingly, there are now two categories of Medicare rebates, a higher rebate for those classified as endorsed (Clinical) psychologists, and a lower rebate for those that have attained their registration via the 4+2 pathway. I don't think even the APS's best academics could present a justifiable argument for having the 2 rates. Both types of psychologists (endorsed and unendorsed) are delivering the same services. To my mind there are no studies that show that Clinical psychologists are delivering superior therapy services when compared to those that have taken the 4+2 pathway. In fact, quite the contrary, there is an abundance of research literature that outlines

what it takes to be a good psychologist, and none of it points to additional university studies (ie. 6 years has not been shown to be superior to 4 years of study).

I urge the Senate to review this situation, and to help stop the attack on the psychology profession, and stop this division. The APS certainly won't be doing it for its members. They've helped create the problem.

Yours sincerely

John Girardi