



Cobalt Pty Ltd
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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Dear Sir/Madam

I am dismayed by the disunity that is currently being fostered in the profession of Psychology in Australia.

Specialities in Psychology including that of Clinical Psychology have developed and existed in the profession since its beginnings in the middle 19th Century – just as Specialities exist in the field of Medicine.

As in Medicine, Psychologists enter Specialities through extensive further education and training. Entry into specialties begins with post-graduate training that builds on knowledge and application skills. In the case of the speciality of Clinical Psychology, Clinical Psychologists receive a level of training in assessment, diagnosis and treatment of psychopathology and mental disorders far in excess of psychological training provided in a basic psychology degree. This training begins after the basic degree has been completed.

Until now, there has never been dissention in the ranks of Psychologists about differences between “Generalist” and “Specialist” psychologists. Each group has recognized the contribution of the other and, as in the field of Medicine, “Generalists” have acknowledged that extra education and training makes for different levels of skills and mastery.

However this unity in the profession Psychology is now being undermined by a small but aggressive group of individual psychologists in response to their receiving a lower level of funding in the two-tier funding arrangement introduced by Medicare in 2006.

This Medicare funding arrangement provides a higher level of remuneration to the speciality of Clinical Psychology just as it pays higher levels of remuneration to Specialities within the field of Medicine.

There is a significant difference between a Generalist Psychologist and a Specialist Psychologist.

What distinguishes Clinical Psychology as a general practice specialty is the breadth of problems addressed and of populations served. Clinical Psychology, in research, education, training and practice, focuses on individual differences, abnormal behaviour, and mental disorders and their prevention, and lifestyle enhancement.

In addition, Clinical Psychology has a special focus on the areas of personality and its development and course; and psychopathology and its prevention and remediation. This emphasis includes the full span of psychopathological disorders and conditions, etiologies, environments, degrees of severity, developmental levels, and the appropriate assessments, interventions, and treatments that are associated with these conditions. Understanding of ethical principles, of diversity and of cultural context are integral components of the knowledge base of all aspects of Clinical Psychology.

Clinical Psychology is built on knowledge of principles of behavioural change, clinical decision-making, and the professional and ethical concerns surrounding clinical practice. Clinical Psychology practitioners have a knowledge base relevant to the populations served, such as cultural awareness, and patterns of normal and deviant development across the life span.

Consultation utilizes knowledge of consultation models in clinical psychology; the theoretical and empirical bases of assessment, diagnosis and intervention; and knowledge of the roles and functions of other professionals with whom clinical psychologists interact, such as physicians, attorneys, and educators.

As a general practice specialty, Clinical Psychology focuses on the understanding, assessment, prediction, prevention, and alleviation of problems related to intellectual function; emotional, biological, psychological, social and behavioural maladjustment, disability, distress, and mental disorder and, therefore of necessity, enhancement of psychological functioning and prevention of dysfunction.

Clinical Psychology is the oldest, largest and most developed speciality in the profession of Psychology world-wide. Funding arrangements that encourage and reward psychologists to further their training, knowledge and skills promote excellence and enhanced delivery of specialized psychological services.

In the field of Psychology, as in Medicine, Specialist knowledge and training translates to enhanced outcomes for the community and warrants a tiered level of funding.

Yours Sincerely,
Robert Dawson Ph.D.
Clinical Psychologist.