

Bernadette Hughes

B.A. (Psych), Grad. Dip. Psych (Counselling),
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Counselling Psychologist

28th July 2011

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Dear Committee

Re: COMMONWEALTH FUNDING AND ADMINISTRATION OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES –

The two tiered Medicare rebate system for Psychologists

I am a Counselling Psychologist with over 15 years experience. I have worked in both the community sector and in private practice. I have been the Senior Clinician of a specialist counselling team. In my private practice, I regularly provide clinical supervision to other Psychologists. I have a busy private practice. GP's refer to me because they are confident about the quality of my work and my effectiveness with clients. I work with a wide range of people and problems, including more complex presentations. In the current system, the very guts of what I do, would be represented by the item numbers connected to 'focussed psychological strategies' *and* 'psychological therapies'; not just 'focussed psychological strategies'. As an experienced and qualified Counselling Psychologist, I have the training and expertise to make treatment choices and provide a range of therapies. **Limiting the treatment choice of myself and other Counselling Psychologists is a woeful waste of valuable resources and is not in clients' best interests. Do you really want over 950 Counselling Psychologists with perfectly matched expertise for the provision of psychological therapies to be working with one hand tied behind their backs?**

The current distinction made between Clinical Psychologists and Counselling Psychologists, where only Clinical Psychologists can offer 'psychological therapies' is staggering to me. Where is the evidence that only this endorsed speciality has the training and expertise to deliver appropriate, evidence based, psychological therapies to clients? Where is the evidence that only that endorsed specialty can work with more complex disorders? Our profession values evidence. I see none.

Alternatively there is clear recognition by the Australian Psychological Society and Australian Health Practitioners Regulation Agency that the training and expertise of Counselling Psychologists lies firmly in the domain of providing assessment, diagnosis and treatment, via evidence based psychological therapies of mental health disorders.

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It appears to me that the Counselling Psychologists have been locked out of using the item numbers most relevant to their clinical work. This decision appears arbitrary, is unfair, a waste of valuable resources and has implication for clients. **I request that the committee:**

acknowledge the expertise of Counselling Psychologists and give Counselling Psychologists the same recognition as Clinical Psychologists in the Medicare rebate system. Thus allowing Counselling Psychologists to provide and bill for 'psychological therapies'.

Yours sincerely

Bernadette Hughes