

David Jonathan Castle

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26th July, 2011

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
Att: Community Affairs References Committee
P. O. Box 6100, Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senate Committee members,

RE: Senate Committee Inquiry – Commonwealth Funding and Administration of Mental Health Services – Reduction of Medicare psychological sessions, and the two-tier system.

I write to express my concern and dismay at the proposed downgrading of the Better Access to Mental Health Scheme as foreshadowed in the 2011-2012 Federal Budget, and the lobbying by an organisation to remove the two-tiered Medicare Rebate system for psychologists.

I am a psychiatrist with many years experience in research, teaching and clinical work and have seen the Better Access Scheme as one of the finest developments in the mental health arena over recent years. I refer many patients to clinical psychologist colleagues and those patients benefit enormously from the evidence-based treatment they receive. Whilst it is true that many patients can obtain substantial benefit from just 6 sessions of therapy, many require more in order to address the complexity of psychological issues facing them, and to leave such patients high and dry after an arbitrary 10 sessions per year is to my mind doing them a great dis-service and indeed making extra problems in the longer term for the health system, in that their problems will not be adequately dealt with: they will in fact become a greater burden on the health system and will have to return to exclusive (and more costly) care by psychiatrists.

Further, the notion that all 'psychologists' are equal is absurd: clinical psychologists are highly trained clinicians and to assume that are the equal of their non-clinical colleagues is akin to saying a qualified aircraft engineer could suitable (and safely) be substituted by a motor mechanic in aircraft maintenance.

I do hope that sense will prevail and, if anything, truly **better** access is afforded in what is currently a good scheme but one which risks perversion and downgrading under the current proposals.

Sincerely,

David J. Castle
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