

27/07/2011

Attention:
The Senate

Reference: Work vail – clinical psychologists versus generalist psychologists

Introduction:

The review of the two tier system of Medicare rebates for mental health services rendered by general and clinical psychologists is being held in the senate on 28/07/2011. The question is whether there should be a two tier Medicare rebate system for psychologists.

On the basis of education and training requirements generalist psychologists currently receive a lower Medicare rebate for services than clinical psychologists.

This difference in rebate reflects the difference in education between the two categories. Clinical psychologists have completed an extra degree, namely a Masters or Doctorate degree, which entails an extra two to four years of study, a research thesis on their subject and relevant practical clinical experience.

The two tier system of Medicare rebates recognises the difference in clinical expertise, competence, years of study and contribution to the development of the profession in terms of supervision, research and education and training by psychologists who have completed a Masters or Doctorate in clinical psychology.

The higher remuneration for clinical psychologists serves to motivate psychologists to become more educated and deliver a best practice service by international standards.

The argument for the two tier system:

It is my view that the two tier Medicare rebate system should be maintained and my reasons are as follows:

I currently work as a clinical psychologist in private practice and have been in fulltime practise as a clinical psychologist since 1981 (for 30 years), after completing a Masters degree. I manage clients with complex mental health disorders. I also train and supervise psychologists in psychotherapy.

My capacity to treat complex mental health disorders and to develop psychotherapy techniques, do clinical research, write educational texts both for professionals and laypersons on mental health, train psychologists in much needed clinical skills is based on my broad clinical knowledge acquired by completing a Masters degree in clinical psychology.

Please note that in a country like South Africa psychologists may not practice unless they have completed a Masters degree in psychology, which includes an internship, i.e. one year full time work in a recognised psychiatric institution.

By comparison psychologists in Australia can practice with an Honours degree and an apprenticeship (part time and not institution based).

If the aim is to now build an effective best practice mental health service in Australia, then development of professional service providers should be the cornerstone. The two tier Medicare remuneration system encourages psychologists to complete a Masters degree in clinical psychology and this will result in a higher standard of service delivery.

Julia Gillard wants the best and brightest teachers in the Education Department. Please choose the same for mental health.

Clinical psychologist
(name withheld)