

Dear Sir, Madam,

I write with a sense of urgency to highlight the fact that Clinical Psychology is a specialist discipline for the treatment of severe psychological disorders i.e. it requires specific and particular training to assess, diagnose and treat severe psychological disorders.

This is distinct from generalist psychology training which is directed towards provision of psychological counselling for people with problems within the normal range including such issues as grief and loss, self-esteem, stress management.

1. The existing two-tier system of Medicare rebate judiciously recognises that these are 2 distinct specialties and I strongly support the maintenance of the existing system.

2. Clinical psychological assessment and treatment of severe psychological presentations is guided by evidence-based practice guidelines. Treatment protocols are derived from clinical research and they specify clinical approach, materials and the number and sequence of sessions. These empirically-based protocols are particular for each disorder. For the more severe conditions e.g. bipolar disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, severe eating disorders, treatment of clients recovering from a psychotic episode, suicidal or psychotic depressions, treatments are longer e.g. the number of sessions of CBT (provided by an experienced clinician) recommended for the treatment of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder is 18.

It is very important that Medicare rebates reflect the evidence-based treatment protocols. There is no one-size fits all for the treatment and number of sessions for severe mental disorders - treatment needs to be targeted, specialised and evidence-based, developed from a careful clinical assessment, diagnosis and treatment plan. 12 sessions with an extra 6 sessions for severe and complex cases, is already inadequate for many severe disorders. To cut this further is dangerous and irresponsible.

I urge you to access evidence-based clinical practice guidelines as the basis for your decision making on the Medicare rebate for clinical psychology service provision. These guidelines are directed towards effective treatment outcomes i.e.. treatment producing good recovery and preventing relapse and re-presentation. It is by supporting targeted evidence-based practice by appropriately-trained clinicians that the government will save health dollars. A one-size fits all, bargain basement approach to mental illness is a dangerous and dodgy approach, and does not befit a responsible mental health care agenda.

Yours sincerely

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