

To the senate committee

24th July 2011

Re: A response to the investigation of the two-tier Medicare system for psychology services

I am a psychologist in private practice. I am a member of the Counselling College of the Australian Psychological Society and also a professional member of the Australian Society of Sex Educators, Researchers and Therapists. I am a facilitator for the Mental Health Professional Network and have presented and facilitated for the specialist Group I initiated and developed – the Sexuality and Mental Health Interest Group.

These memberships were gained after years of long years of on-going study and training which provided me with rich learning opportunities in multiple settings under the supervision and guidance of a multitude of highly experienced psychologists including many years of experience. I worked for 16 years as a psychology teacher and school counsellor working with students, parents and school staff across a range of mental health, welfare, psycho-educational, and developmental areas before I came into private practice 22 years ago – well before Medicare!

Rather than competing with colleagues, psychologists such as myself had added value to the profession and to their clients. I have utilized the exceptional training experience in my earlier training in the education sector to support all psychologists and mental health professionals to gain critical understanding of sexuality and relationship issues.

I mentor clinical psychologists who, as a result of the two-tier system of remuneration of the Better Access Initiative have greater rebates for their clients. Who could possibly believe that a university graduate is a more experienced practitioner than psychologists who have proved their credibility to their peers and their clients over the long term?

When I was invited by the South City GP division to speak to their doctors at a seminar, I was informed I was selected because I had more doctor referrals from a range of doctors than any other psychologist in the division. Doctors had received positive feedback for my skill set and positive outcomes for management of their mental health issues – my credibility was not based on being a counselling or clinical psychologist! Doctor's care more about the quality of service; credibility of the psychologists and therapeutic rapport and so do clients.

I make this written submission to you to humbly request that you consider the disparities in professional recognition. In the past new regulations applying to different colleges and individuals in the Australian Psychological Society were covered by a "grandfather's clause" taking into account the psychologist extensive training and experience. This principle could be considered in the current situation.

I hope that these points are given weight in your discussions of the two-tiered Medicare rebate system within the Better Access initiative and I stress that the profession of psychology and the community as a whole will suffer if 80% of psychologist are unable to continue to provide quality services to the public.

Yours sincerely,

SARAH CALLEJA

Counselling Psychologist and Certified Sex Therapist