

Tuesday, 26 July 2011

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Re: "The Senate Community Affairs Committeerecommends the single lower rate for all psychologists including clinical psychologists....."

I am writing as a Sydney based Clinical Psychologist in my own private practice.

I am extremely concerned about the suggested cuts for Clinical Psychologists as I believe that those cuts are a disservice for clients in need and endangers the level of quality for psychological services in the long run.

Unlike generalist psychologists, "Clinical Psychologists" have a minimum of eight years of training to manage the treatment across the full range of mental disorders, for all age groups. The title "clinical psychologist" guarantees a minimum level of qualifications for this responsible position.

The term "Generalist psychologists", however, does not guarantee any specific training in managing clients' issues. This is a sad but true. I could name a registered psychologist, who never spent a single session with a patient. Yes this is possible under the 4+2 regulation. Therefore, in every day life, you will find extremely well trained "generalist psychologists", but also the poorly trained. Is it just to pay the same amount of money for the poor and the excellent trained psychologists? Also, how difficult is it for clients to differentiate?

Psychologist in own private practice provide the best possible service to the community, because it is in their best interest to build and maintain their reputation. Being in private practice, however, requires a significant commitment to invest in office space, IT and business systems, marketing etc. Also, those in private practice are the most experienced because need to know your business before starting out one yourself.

I heard that a survey states the counselling results do not depend on whether clients saw a generalist or a clinical psychologist. I do not believe that this survey has identified the relevant factors which underly quality services, e.g. the qualifications of members of the APS College of Counselling Psychologists. Axing the 4+2 access to psychologist registration is the right step in the right direction to warrant quality counselling. However this is not enough.

Suggestions for the future to take the provision of counselling services to the next level:

- 1) As in other countries, e.g. Germany, only Clinical Psychologist should be able to provide counselling under Medicare, to warrant a minimum of training and qualification, and to

provide a very clear signal to the public that the government only supports high quality services.

2) To avoid injustices, a transition phase needs to be implemented, so that qualified generalist or counselling psychologists could step up (the latter already have extensive training).

Mental health is a growing issue worldwide and also in Australia. Professional counselling has proved to lower the costs for society. Let's make sure, Australians get the best possible service and remunerate the worker at the coal face appropriately.

Senator / Minister, I urge you to reject proposals for the single lower rate in the Medicare rebate system immediately and instead maintain the two tier system until a viable solution is found.

Yours sincerely,

Frank Breuer
Clinical Psychologist MAPS