

SENATE INQUIRY

Terms of Reference:

Proposed changes to the Better Access Initiative

- * rationalisation of allied health treatment sessions,
- * changes to the number of allied mental health treatment services for patients with mild or moderate mental illness under the Medicare Benefits Schedule

These changes propose to reduce the number of sessions that are re-imbursed by Medicare to a Psychologist or Allied Health Practitioner treating patients who have a diagnosis of a Mental Illness.

Currently patients can access 18 sessions – it is proposed to reduce this to 10 (see submission from Life Promotion Clinic for research regarding the recommended number of sessions for specific diagnoses).

Reducing to 10 subsidised sessions could be paralleled to saying if one has a simple break to his leg, is young and fit, follows doctors instructions explicitly – then he can look forward to treatment being successful – however if the break should be complex, the patient at all compromised then the patient will have to pay for the further treatment required.

I work in the Emergency Department Mental Health Assessments of PAH and in the Life Promotion Clinic attached to AISRAP - the Australian Institute of Suicide Research and Prevention. I cannot remember when I have last seen a patient who would fit the term the “worried well” (or the young fit ones with simple breaks.

Most patients who do have a diagnosed Mental Illness find it difficult to sustain employment, Predominantly their only access to treatment is through subsidised initiatives. The public hospital system provides very little psychological therapy per patient with a mental illness.

Research into the Better Outcomes Initiative, reports that it has been a successful program with a much greater uptake than expected. Prior to this initiative, many patients seen in the Public Emergency Department continued to re-present from crisis to crisis without ever being able to actually access a treatment program

If funding needs to be adjusted perhaps the access to Mental Health Care Plans can be tightened up. Reducing the number of sessions essentially means that the patients who can't hold down a secure job because of their mental illness – cannot complete treatment..

Further to the research submitted to this inquiry supporting the efficacy of Psychological therapy, we know that language development in the human species emerged as a means of communicating thoughts, feelings and ideas so it is logical that it is through language and structured evidenced based therapy that those with disorders of thought, feelings and ideas can recover.

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