

Monday 25th July 2011

Submission to the Government's 2011-12 Budget changes relating to mental health services in Australia

I would like to make a comment to reference (e)(ii) regarding the workforce qualifications and training of psychologists.

I am a Provisional Psychologist and my workforce experience has mainly been within a clinical setting (a public mental health service) and I chose the supervised practice pathway as I live 400-kilometres from the nearest city that offers postgraduate psychology courses. I am displeased that my on-the-job training and experience may be undermined and discredited by Clinical Psychologists because of the choice I made which was not to undergo formalised postgraduate study.

I now work in the employment services setting where many of the unemployed have been diagnosed with a psychological disorder. However they may be considered not severe enough to access treatment in a public mental health service nor can they afford the gap fee if they were referred to a private psychologist under a Mental Health Care Plan (there are no bulk billing psychologists in my area). Many Clinical Psychologists would argue once I qualify as a Generalist Psychologist I am not conducting clinical work. However I have been assessing and treating serious and severe mental health disorders for much of my career to date. All psychologists are trained with clinical skills for a minimum of six-years and most are diligent and maintain their skills with supervision and professional development activities.

I have spent in the order of \$25,000 completing undergraduate psychology degrees plus thousands of dollars has been spent on supervision fees and professional development and I too have taken nearly nine-years to obtain my qualification, Generalist Psychologist (the application is with the registration board and I am still waiting on a decision). Again many Clinical Psychologists will argue that it has taken them near a decade to gain the title of Clinical Psychologist.

Prior to 1st July 2010, to qualify as a Clinical Psychologist, via the Australian Psychological Society, you could follow the pathway of experience of which you had to have a minimum of five-years instead of the formalised postgraduate study and supervised practice. I don't remember all the details of this alternate pathway but this pathway has now been abolished and the focus is now on formal postgraduate qualifications. I was hoping to gain recognition by following the alternate pathway and this too would take longer than the standard postgraduate study route.

Now it is beyond 1st July 2010 and the pathway to qualify as a Clinical Psychologist is encased in law where one can be classified as "Endorsed" in the area of choice but the only pathway is via postgraduate study. Unfortunately it is not in my plan to uproot my family and move to the city for the sake of completing postgraduate study.

I request the abolishment of the “Endorsed” and “Unendorsed” classifications as all psychologists are trained in clinical methods; it is just that some have followed a formalised pathway and others not. Just because I have chosen the less formal on-the-job training option makes me no less qualified than someone who had the option to participate in postgraduate study. The supervised practice (ie on-the-job) option does ensure one is meeting all the requirements that make up an effective psychologist.

I look forward to hearing about the outcome of the Senate Inquiry.

Kindest regards,