

## ***Leisa Thompson M Psych. Counselling Psychologist***

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**Professor Brin Grenyer, Chair**  
Psychology Board of Australia  
G.P.O. Box 9958  
Melbourne VIC 3001

### **Re: Guidelines on Psychology Area of Practice Endorsements**

Dear Brin,

As a Counselling psychologist with specialist title registration in Western Australia, I am writing to you because I am concerned about the recently published guidelines for PBA endorsements for “areas of practice” in psychology, which outlines how each of the registered areas can be described. I am concerned that all references to diagnosis and mental health disorders have been excluded from the description of counselling psychology.

I am currently working in private practice and am very concerned about attempts to devalue both my current qualifications and my expertise. Over my career as a Counselling psychologist I have worked in a number of areas including school psychology, working for Vietnam Veterans Counselling Service, and in private practice. In all these areas I have worked with and continue to work with clients who present with mental health disorders including, depression, anxiety, complex PTSD etc. General Practitioners regularly refer patients to me with mental health disorders. It seems to me that changes that are currently proposed have not been substantiated in terms of outcomes or performance. They appear to be politically driven and I am finding myself in the position where I stand to be marginalised in my professional standing and ability to earn an income. I currently provide the same service for a substantially smaller Medicare rebate.

I bring your attention to the fact that the content for each of these descriptions for “areas of practice” is derived from the content of each corresponding APS College ([www.psychology.org.au/community](http://www.psychology.org.au/community)). Specifically, I note that in nearly every case, these descriptions are verbatim matches for the first two sentences of each APS College brochure. In the case of the PBA description for “counselling psychology” however, it would appear that the reference to “mental health disorders” has simply been removed. To be clear, here are the first two sentences describing counselling psychologists on the website for the APS College of Counselling Psychology:

*Counselling psychologists are specialists in the provision of psychological therapy. They provide psychological assessment and psychotherapy for individuals, couples, families and groups, and treat a wide range of psychological problems and mental health disorders*

By comparison, here is the description that the Psychology Board of Australia offers:

*Counselling psychologists are specialists in the provision of psychological therapy. They provide psychological assessment and psychotherapy for individuals, couples, families and groups, and treat a wide range of psychological problems*

I do not understand why the PBA have removed any reference to the work of counselling psychologists with mental health disorders and why the PBA did not enhance the description of counselling psychology to specify the advanced skills of our practitioners in diagnosis.

If you refer to the Checklist of Specialist Skills and Knowledge for counselling psychology on the website for the Psychologists Board of Western Australia the document states that diagnosis of psychopathology is an advanced competency that counselling psychologist registrars are evaluated on, in addition to the requirement to demonstrate broad-ranging skills in psychotherapy. The most up to date revisions of the APS College of Counselling Psychologists course approval guidelines, and domains of knowledge documents, make it clear that specialised competencies in the diagnosis and treatment of mental health disorders is deemed an essential proficiency.

My practice has always been informed by the understanding that diagnosis and treatment of mental health disorders are essential to the definition of counselling psychology in Australia. As a psychologist who specialises in psychological therapy, advanced-level skills in diagnosis are required. Every credible source of information about counselling psychology reinforces this point.

I request that the description for counselling psychology be amended immediately to align with the advice that has been received from every representative and registration group that has up until now defined this specialist domain of the psychology profession. I continue to remain concerned about the impact of national registration on both the profession of psychology and the clients I serve. I do ask that you provide me with clarification and further information as these codes and guidelines develop and that equity for all psychologists working in this area be provided.

Yours faithfully,

Leisa Thompson  
Counselling Psychologist  
9<sup>th</sup> September 2010