

College of Counselling Psychologists
July 30 2010



To: 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,

Re: Definition of counselling psychology used in PBA documents

We would appreciate it if you could raise the following issue with the PBA somewhat urgently. It is an urgent issue because of the significant political implications for counselling psychologists. The recently published *Guidelines on Psychology Area of Practice Endorsement* defines each of the seven areas (p. 7). We are very concerned that all references to diagnosis and mental health disorders have been excluded from the description of counselling psychology. It would appear that all 7 of the descriptions of 'areas of practice' are derived from the content of each corresponding APS College (www.psychology.org.au/community). In nearly every case, these descriptions are either verbatim matches for the first two sentences of each APS College brochure or slightly enhanced descriptions.

However, the PBA description for 'counselling psychology' has removed the reference to 'mental health disorders'. 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.***

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.

Hopefully this is an oversight, but it has very significant political implications for counselling psychology, particularly in the ongoing difficulties with access to the top tier Medicare Rebate, but in other domains as well. Please refer to the following documents for documentary supporting evidence that the level of qualification, training standards, competencies, and international definitions all

make it clear that counselling psychologists are trained to provide psychological therapy for a range of psychological problems and mental health disorders:

1. The APS brochure on counselling psychology (which has a specific section on diagnosis and treatment of clients with mental health disorders)
<http://www.psychology.org.au/community/specialist/counselling/>
2. The *Checklist of Specialist Skills and Knowledge* for counselling psychology on the website for the Psychologists Board of Western Australia
<http://www.psychboard.wa.gov.au/documents/counsellingchecklist.pdf>
The document makes it clear that diagnosis of psychopathology is an advanced competency required of counselling psychologists.
3. The course approval guidelines (latest revision April 2010) for accreditation standards for university programs under APAC, which are attached to this email.
4. A seminal review paper on counselling psychology published in the *Australian Journal of Counselling Psychology* which reviews both Australian and international research and perspectives on counselling psychologists:
[http://www.groups.psychology.org.au/Assets/Files/Counselling%20Psychology%20in%20Australia%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.groups.psychology.org.au/Assets/Files/Counselling%20Psychology%20in%20Australia%20(2).pdf)

We would very much appreciate your support in raising this issue with the rest of the Board and changing this anomaly as soon as possible. As you are well aware, the Medicare two-tier rebate system has created enormous divisiveness amongst the endorsed specialties and has also contributed to the closure of a number of non-clinical specialist postgraduate programs. We understand that there is currently a review of Better Access to Mental Health Care and of course official definitions are extremely significant in these matters. We are happy to discuss this with you further.

Yours Sincerely,



Elaine Hosie
Chair
College of Counselling Psychologists