

SENATE COMMITTEE:**REGISTRATION of PSYCHOLOGISTS – AHPRA**

I am writing this submission, briefly and in haste, having just learned about it and the closing date, 14th April 2011, of the Senate Committee on the Inquiry into regulation of health practitioner registration by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA).

I have been a Psychologist since 1970 and operated a private practice since April 1988, 23 years. My training is that of a Registered Psychologist, and trained Psychotherapist.

I am a full member of the APS College of Counselling Psychologists and the Educational & Developmental College. These mean that I am endorsed, in the present system, for these specialties. It is noteworthy however, that until the present system, I was not endorsed, and in particular, not as a clinical psychologist. Also, being in [REDACTED], I have not had a specialist title under the previous [REDACTED] system.

Furthermore, had I not happened to be a member of the Australian Psychological (APS), I would not have become 'endorsed', since for someone qualified as I am, this would not be possible in the present system. Thus, the APS membership has been the instrument of becoming endorsed – while someone else, qualified as I am, would not be so endorsed.

Experience in the field, with the clients and colleagues, indicates that it is not the particular university degree that a practitioner has completed that ensures their superior performance in the field. Once practitioners qualify and enter the field of psychology, it is other factors, such as their humanity, personal insight and organizational skills that are likely to distinguish an outstanding practitioner.

As things stand, there are many psychologists who have worked competently and humanistically for several decades, who are being relegated to a lower tier while newly qualified practitioners with little experience or insight training are being granted a higher status. I am not qualified to state how this should play in the long (i.e. which university or other qualifications should be endorsed) but it is clear that in the shorter term there should be a 'grandfathering' status, whereby practitioners who have worked perfectly well for perhaps many years, are not placed on a lower professional tier.

By applying such tiers in what appears an arbitrary fashion, much impairing is done:-

 Clients find they are seeing someone who is no longer considered fully competent (yet was). The clients have access to lesser funding.

 The practitioners are doing equivalent work, for less payment. [there are studies that show it is difficult to impossible to distinguish between the work carried out by endorsed or unendorsed psychologists. I would have to refer you to the submission from the AAPi to substantiate this.]

 The profession itself is divided, with much ill will and dissatisfaction between members.

As a practitioner, I have many times received clients who have previously attended high profile, endorsed clinicians. However, something about the work did not gel for them – perhaps the style, perhaps some of those individual, human factors. For these people the specific qualification or level of endorsement did not result in completed personal work. It is hard to be satisfied with this situation, whereby in such an instance, the client is getting the peace of mind they sought, but (a) perhaps having to pay more from their pocket (if they are, for example, using the Medicare option), while (b) I receive less overall than the psychologist whose qualifications are better acknowledged by the system, but who did not happen to achieve completion of the client work.

I am not able to suggest the solution to the fair registration of psychologists. However, it does need acknowledgement that the present system contains much that is unfair, and inscrutable. This impacts detrimentally upon clients, the individual practitioner and the broad professional sphere. It needs to be taken into account, attended to, and more constructive parameters set.