

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Budget Estimates 2017 - 2018, 29 May 2017

Ref No: SQ17-000696

OUTCOME: 2 - Health Access and Support Services

Topic: Mental Health

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Reynolds, Linda

Question:

- a) Department guide indicates: “in a stepped care approach, a person presenting to the mental health system is matched to the intervention level that most suits their current need[s]”. Can you please explain the different levels and the resources that are provided in making this evaluation?
- b) Who makes the evaluation and what training/qualifications do they have?
- c) In many of these circumstances, the face-to-face interaction and establishment of rapport between the psychologist and the patient is crucial to getting people the appropriate help they need. Was this taken into consideration?
- d) Under this scheme, are you aware of any drawbacks and or shortcomings that may exist between general psychologists and clinical psychologists?
- e) Have any incidents been brought to the department’s attention?

Answer:

a) Stepped Care is a foundation concept for commissioning of mental health services by primary health networks (PHNs). It is a system for organising mental health services comprising a hierarchy of interventions, from the least to the most intensive, matched to the individual’s needs. While there are multiple levels within a stepped care approach, they do not operate in silos or as one directional steps, but rather offer a spectrum of service interventions.

Stepped care is not a treatment in itself, nor a Government program or scheme. During their commissioning cycle PHNs undertake needs analyses and commission services to address gaps and meet local needs. People with mental illness are matched with appropriate services based on their condition and following assessment. All PHNs are required to ensure that the assessment approaches used operate within a proper clinical governance framework, overseen by clinically trained professionals.

b) The precise implementation of a stepped care approach will depend on the local implementation. The stepped care approach is inclusive of the normal, well established referral and treatment approaches established within the medical profession.

Other health professions, such as mental health nurses and psychologists also have a role in ensuring the services a person with mental illness receives are consistent with their needs at any given time.

The most common referral pathway to the services commissioned by PHNs is through GPs, following their assessment and discussion with the patient.

c) The introduction of stepped care models into the design of mental health systems does not impact the direct relationship between a patient and their psychologist within a treatment setting.

d) No.

e) No.