

10 July 2008

Submission on ACC Counsellor Category of Provider for Sensitive Claimants

The NZCCP understand ACC is to review the fee structure under the regulations as they apply to the counsellor category of providers for sensitive claimants. It is our view that clinical psychologists represent a specialist group working within the counsellor category.

Issues relevant to this submission are the extensive training and expertise psychologists bring to this work and the accessibility of psychologist providers to clients.

Clinical psychologists have graduated from a university degree programme comprising Bachelor and Master's degrees in psychology and a Post Graduate Diploma in Clinical Psychology. The undergraduate degree provides a broad knowledge base pertaining to human development, relationships and function. The post graduate component provides specific training in diagnosis and psychological formulation providing for an accurate and treatment focussed assessment using an evidence based treatment approach. These are specialised skills that set clinical psychologists apart from their counselling colleagues and offer clients the best opportunity for recovery and rehabilitation. Notably, these skills sit well with the practice parameters advanced in the recently released "Sexual Abuse and Mental Injury: Practice Guidelines for Aotearoa New Zealand".

Factors affecting accessibility include the relatively high rate of GP and self referral to clinical psychologists to undertake this work, the small workforce able to meet the demand and the discrepancy between what ACC pays to clinical psychologists and private practice fees.

In preparing this submission the NZCCP conducted a survey among College members who are currently providing therapeutic services under the counsellor category or have done so in the past. 35 members responded. Of those 16 are still providing therapeutic services to sensitive claimants. 19 have stopped taking referrals, but nearly all of them indicated they would resume the work if the fee structure was increased in keeping with private practice fees. Members suggested an hourly rate between \$130.00 - \$160.00 plus gst., with most recommending the hourly rate equate with that paid under a psychological services contract, that is \$143.12 plus gst.

A number of members suggested that clinical psychologist providers undertake work with clients where their presentation is complex requiring a more skilled and targeted treatment based upon sound clinical formulation and diagnosis.

In summary, the survey shows clearly that a separate provider category for clinical psychologists appropriately remunerated would double the available workforce and may attract members in private practice who have not previously undertaken this work. NZCCP currently have 195 members in private practice nationally which is a significant workforce for ACC to draw upon in providing services to sensitive claimants.

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