

## **Provision of subsidised supervision to increase field placement opportunities for higher numbers of clinical psychology trainees boosted under Government mental health reforms**

**An initiative proposed by the Australian Psychological Society  
May 2006**

### **Introduction**

The recently announced Australian Government mental health reforms include an initiative to increase the mental health workforce by providing 200 extra clinical psychology university training places per year.<sup>1</sup> There are significant training implications associated with these increased places beyond the education that is provided by universities. In a similar fashion to the training of doctors, training of professional psychologists requires supervised experience in clinical settings in tandem with the acquisition of theoretical knowledge from university courses. The training experience in clinical settings must be supervised by expert psychologists to ensure that trainees acquire the skills and knowledge for independent professional practice. The Government's initiative to expand the mental health workforce will therefore only be successful if the increased number of clinical psychology training places is matched by an increase in the opportunities for supervised clinical experience in the field. Recommendations to meet this need are provided in this proposal, and, if implemented, will ensure the success of the Government's initiative to increase the mental health workforce by increasing the training places for clinical psychology. This proposal has the endorsement of the peak body representing Australian university psychology training programs, the Heads of Departments and Schools of Psychology Association (HODSPA).

### **Current clinical psychology training requirements**

The accrediting body for Australian university psychology courses is the Australian Psychology Accreditation Council (APAC), which has been recently formed and is comprised of representatives from the Australian Psychological Society (APS) and the Council of Psychologists Registration Boards (CPRB). The accreditation of courses is actually carried out by the APS and this has been the case for many years. Accreditation of postgraduate courses providing education in the professional practice of psychology also requires approval by the appropriate APS specialist College. In the case of clinical psychology training programs, the APS College of Clinical Psychologists Course Approval Guidelines apply. These Guidelines ensure that students successfully completing accredited courses will function at a high level of professional competence and responsibility, and will possess knowledge of, and skills for, current evidence-based treatments of mental health disorders.

Experience through Practical Placements is a mandatory component of the training of student clinical psychologists for independent professional roles in the clinical field. Its essential purpose is to ensure that students have appropriate opportunities to apply, under supervision, the knowledge and skills they have acquired in the education and training program. General requirements for Practical Placements are provided in the APS College of Clinical Psychologists Course Approval Guidelines, which include extended clinical placements over the duration of

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<sup>1</sup> Prime Minister of Australia (2006). *Better Mental Health Services for Australia*. Media release 5 April 2006. [www.pm.gov.au/news/media\\_Release1858.html](http://www.pm.gov.au/news/media_Release1858.html).

postgraduate courses, with professional supervision provided by registered specialist clinical psychologists in the field. Masters degree students must complete a minimum of 1000 hours of supervised practical placement experience, and Doctorate students are required to undertake 1500 hours of supervised practicum. The total contact time with clinical field supervisors is required to be at least 200 hours during postgraduate training.

The initial practice experience of students in the first year of postgraduate training is usually gained under the guidance of the university department's clinical staff in the department's own clinic located at the university. In the second year of training, Practical Placements are usually in hospital departments where students are exposed to professional practice in multidisciplinary teams, with a broad range of client problems across varying age ranges and the full range of severity. Students in the final year of postgraduate professional psychology training are expected to have field Placements and supervision that emphasise a higher level of autonomy and responsibility.

### **Recommendations for provision of supervised Practical Placements for new clinical psychology trainees**

The requirements for supervised Practical Placements outlined above will be applicable to all students completing training in the 200 extra clinical psychology training places provided under the Government's recently announced mental health reforms. It is clear that a significant increase in the opportunities for field supervision is required to meet the demand placed by the new clinical psychology trainees. Most of the existing clinical psychology student Placements are in hospitals and community clinics within the public sector, and are extremely competitive as opportunities are quite limited.

We propose that supervised Placement opportunities for clinical psychology trainees within the private sector can be made readily available by providing an incentive through a subsidy for supervision for experienced clinical psychologists to offer supervision in two settings – general practice and private psychiatric hospitals. The private psychiatric hospital Placement would be suitable for students in the second year of training, offering the equivalent experience to Placement in a public sector hospital. Practical Placements within general practices would be available to clinical psychology students in the final year of postgraduate training, where there is an expectation of a higher level of autonomy and responsibility.

#### *1. Practical Placements in private psychiatric hospitals supervised by employed clinical psychologists*

Private psychiatric hospitals offer broad mental health training experiences in both inpatient and outpatient settings, but are currently under-utilised as Practical Placement opportunities for student psychologists due to limited employment of clinical psychologists who could provide the supervision. Many private psychiatric hospitals employ clinical psychologists only on a part-time basis and may require an incentive to extend the hours of employment of clinical psychologists to open opportunities for student placement at the hospital under supervision. There may be enough incentive associated with the 'free' psychological services provided by the student on placement.

Alternatively, a subsidised supervision scheme could be applied to private psychiatric hospitals to provide an incentive for increasing the hours of employment of clinical psychologists to enable supervision of clinical psychology trainees on Placement. A cost per student placement, based on a fee-for-service supervision subsidy according to the required number of hours of supervision, would be calculated and used to provide incentive for private psychiatric hospitals to extend the hours of employment of clinical psychologists.

## 2. *Practical Placements in general practice supervised by local clinical psychologists in private practice*

Clinical psychology trainees would be 'attached' to a Division of General Practice (DGP) for the final year of their training, where, under supervision by an experienced clinical psychologist, they would provide assessment and treatment of clients with mental health problems as referred by GPs. Supervision would be provided by local, independently practising, registered clinical psychologists who are familiar with the GPs in the DGP through involvement in the local Division's Better Outcomes in Mental Health Care (BOMHC) program. The privately practising clinical psychologist may even be co-located at a general practice where the student is on Placement. It is essential that clinical psychology trainees receive supervision from senior members of their profession not only in the area of assessment and treatment of mental health disorders but also in how to work collaboratively with GPs in primary care settings. Local BOMHC-registered psychologists who are clinical psychologists would be ideally placed to provide supervision in both of these areas. It is essential that the APS and HODSPA be involved in the choice of supervisors to ensure that their qualifications and experience are appropriate. A student incentive could be provided for undertaking such a Practical Placement in rural general practices through a funded contribution towards the student's travel and accommodation expenses.

A model for psychology interns (postgraduate students in clinical psychology) to be 'attached' to a general practice under university Practical Placement arrangements has been successfully trialed in a number of Divisions of General Practice (DGPs) in rural and regional NSW and Victoria. The Australian Government-funded *Clinical Psychology in General Practice Project* has demonstrated the effectiveness of early intervention clinical psychology services in general practices provided by psychology interns under the supervision of specialist psychologists.<sup>2</sup>

The proposed general practice Placement scheme with subsidised supervision provided by local clinical psychologists would ensure student psychologists receive experience and preparation for working in the primary care setting. This scheme would thus contribute to psychology workforce development in primary care. The incentive for general practices to be involved in the scheme would be the capacity to offer free psychological services to consumers.

### **Practical details and costs associated with these recommendations**

The costs associated with this proposal would involve the provision of a subsidy for clinical psychologists to supervise trainees on a fee-for-service basis of \$150 per hour. Fee-for-service supervision costs would include every hour spent on face-to-face supervision and supervision-related activities, such as providing student reports to universities and attending the mandatory meeting with a university staff member regarding the student's progress. There would also be infrastructure costs associated with setting up the new supervisory arrangements and ongoing liaison between the universities and field Placement personnel around Australia. This would involve two full time experienced clinical psychologists, one responsible for the universities and one for the field placements. We propose that these positions would be administered by the APS.

The number of days of Practical Placement students must undertake in each of the years of training must fulfil the required number of supervised Placement hours under the APS College of Clinical Psychologists Course Approval Guidelines. This proposal is concerned with the Practical Placements in the second and third year of training in a Doctorate of Clinical Psychology and is based on general estimates of (1) the 2<sup>nd</sup> year Practical Placement in a private psychiatric hospital being 2 days per week for 35 weeks, with 1 hour per week of supervision by a clinical psychologist; and (2) the 3<sup>rd</sup> year Practical Placement in general practice being 2 days per week for 45 weeks, with 1 hour per week of supervision by a clinical psychologist.

<sup>2</sup> Vines, R.F., Richards, J.C., Thomson, D.M., Brechman-Toussaint, M., Kluin, M., & Vesely, L. (2004). Clinical psychology in general practice: a cohort study. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 181, 74-77.

*Costs per student for supervision for 3<sup>rd</sup> year Practical Placement in general practice per annum*

- 1 hour per week for 45 weeks face-to-face supervision = 45 hours
- 10 hours supervision-related activities over the course of the Placement = 10 hours
- Total cost per student per Placement for 55 hours supervision @ \$150 per hour = \$8,250
- Costs for 200 students for subsidised supervision = \$1.65M p.a.

*Administrative costs for setting up supervision arrangements for 200 students per annum*

- Salaries and on-costs for 2 full-time experienced clinical psychologists, administered by the APS = \$180,000 p.a.
- Liaison and travel costs for establishing field Placements around Australia = \$30,000 p.a.
- Total administrative costs for supervision arrangements for 200 students = \$210,000 p.a.

***Total costs for 200 students for supervision for Practical Placements during 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> years of training = \$1.86M p.a.***

#### Optional additional incentives

*Additional costs per student per annum for subsidised supervision incentive for 2<sup>nd</sup> year Practical Placement in a private psychiatric hospital*

- 1 hour per week for 35 weeks face-to-face supervision = 35 hours
- 10 hours supervision-related activities over the course of the Placement = 10 hours
- Total cost per student per Placement for 45 hours supervision @ \$150 per hour = \$6,750
- Total costs for 200 students = \$1.35M p.a.

*Additional costs per student per annum for incentive to undertake 3<sup>rd</sup> year Practical Placement in rural DGP*

- Contribution towards travel and accommodation costs of \$250 per week for 45 weeks = \$11,250
- Total costs for 60 students (30% of yearly intake) = \$675,000 p.a.

**TOTAL COSTS PER ANNUM FOR SUBSIDISED PLACEMENT SUPERVISION FOR 200 STUDENTS DURING 2<sup>ND</sup> AND 3<sup>RD</sup> YEARS OF TRAINING, INCLUDING PRIVATE PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL SUBSIDISED SUPERVISION INCENTIVE AND RURAL PLACEMENT INCENTIVE = \$3.89M p.a.**

#### **Further information about this proposal**

Further details regarding these initiatives to provide subsidised supervision by registered clinical psychologists to increase field placement opportunities for new clinical psychology trainees can be obtained from Professor Lyn Littlefield, Executive Director, Australian Psychological Society – telephone 03 8662 3300.