



The New Zealand Psychological Society

*Te Rōpū Mātai Hinengaro o Aotearoa*



*Te Whare Wānanga o te Mātauranga Hinengaro*

**The New Zealand College of Clinical Psychologists**

## **Media Release**

**Wednesday 28 October, 2009**

**For immediate release**

**Attention: Health and Social Issues Reporters**

Responding to criticisms of the new ACC process for dealing with sexual abuse claims, the Minister for ACC Dr Nick Smith is reported in the media today as saying that there are “professional disagreements between psychologists and psychotherapists and counsellors about the changes to the management of sensitive claims”.

The New Zealand Psychological Society (the Society) and the New Zealand College of Clinical Psychologists (the College) is concerned by this statement because there are many serious concerns shared by psychologists, counsellors and psychotherapists about the new ACC procedures.

First, there is agreement that ACC does not appear to have been responsive to the feedback they have been given by a range of professional organisations involved in providing sensitive claims services and from the clients who use them. Some of the problems already identified in the earlier clinical pathway proposal remain in the new clinical pathway.

Second, requiring sexual abuse survivors to disclose their abuse to more than one clinician is likely to be experienced as psychologically unsafe by many clients and may deter people from seeking help when they need it.

Third, the suggestion that sixteen sessions is sufficient to meet the needs of *most* sexual abuse survivors does not accurately reflect the range of experiences of sexual abuse (e.g. from one-off assaults to complex and on-going assault within familial relationships). These are likely to produce different reactions - both in terms of severity and type - requiring different treatments and different durations of treatment.

Fourth, while Psychologists endorse the use of evidence based practice, the requirement that a DSM IV<sup>1</sup> diagnosis is needed to gain access to treatment will limit the number of people who can access care. Individuals not meeting the strict requirements of a DSM diagnosis may still be severely affected by trauma.

Fifth, the requirement for four weekly reporting is bureaucratically burdensome for clinicians and will intrude into the process of therapy, without contributing to successful outcomes.

Sixth, a pathway that limits the assessment of claims to clinical psychologists (as well as psychiatrists and those psychotherapists trained to use the DSM IV) is likely to put pressure on the available psychological workforce – already in short supply. There are many experienced counsellors and psychotherapists who have been providing initial assessments for ACC sensitive claims whose skills will be lost to the workforce as a result of this new pathway.

The Society and the College call on the Minister to listen to the shared concerns of the professional groups who work in sensitive claims and ensure that ACC processes and procedures appropriately meet the needs of claimants who require a sensitive, responsive, competent, and timely professional service.

**#####ENDS#####**

**Background to the New Zealand Psychological Society and the New Zealand College of Clinical Psychologists.**

The New Zealand Psychological Society is the largest professional association for psychologists in New Zealand. It has over 900 members and

aims to improve individual and community wellbeing by representing, promoting and advancing the scientific discipline and practice of psychology.

See [www.psychology.org.nz](http://www.psychology.org.nz). for more information about the Society.

The New Zealand College of Clinical Psychologists is the specialist organisation for clinical psychologists. With over 600 members the College is dedicated to maintaining professional standards, protecting the public, and influencing beneficial legislative changes in order to promote the well-being and emotional health of society. For more information: [www.nzccp.co.nz](http://www.nzccp.co.nz).

---

<sup>i</sup> The ***Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*** is published by the American Psychiatric Association and provides diagnostic criteria for mental disorders. It is used internationally, by clinicians, researchers, health insurance companies, and policy makers.