

15 October 2009

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release



RACGP disappointed by new mental health training policy

Around 20% of adult Australians, or one in five people, will experience a mental illness at some stage in their lives and 7.6% of GP consultations relate to a problem of a psychological character. Many more GP consultations indirectly involve mental health issues.

General practitioners are highly skilled and provide a critical part of the mental health care system in Australia. Mental health skills training is embedded in the RACGP Curriculum for Australian General Practitioners and assessed through the FRACGP examination.

“We are deeply disappointed by the budget decision intended to save \$21.7 million over four years, reducing rebates for patients whose GP has not undertaken ‘accredited mental health skills training’ (previously known as Level 1 mental health training),” said Dr Chris Mitchell, RACGP President.

“These savings will come from patients’ rebates with mental health problems; some of the most needy members of our community.

“Despite the college’s consistent advocacy on this matter a new schedule and benefits will be introduced from 1 January 2010.

“Even though we have concerns over the process around the implementation of these changes, general practice will continue to assist our patients accessing care in our fractured health system,” concluded Dr Mitchell.

For those GPs who wish to access further mental health skills training, *gplearning* currently offers three mental health active learning modules on depression, bipolar and psychosis. Any one of these three 6-hour modules meets the requirements for ‘accredited’ training under the new items. In addition, many other modules relevant to mental health can be found on this site which has just had a major up-grade. Visit www.gplearning.com.au.

The RACGP encourages GPs to contact their local member of parliament and let them know what they think of this decision. Contact details can be found at www.aph.gov.au/House/members/mi-elctr.asp.

For more information regarding the Better Access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and General Practitioners through the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) initiative, including a fact sheet on the implementation of mental health skills training for general practitioners, visit www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/mental-ba.

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About the RACGP

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) sets and maintains the standards for quality clinical practice, education and training, and research in Australian general practice, and represents Australia’s urban and rural general practitioners. Visit www.racgp.org.au.