

## **Submission to the PBA by Dr. Simon Crisp MAPS - 23 November 2009**

### **Recommendation that the PBA require adherence to the following guidelines for Psychologists for the presentation of qualifications in the marketplace**

#### **Need**

Guidelines are desperately needed to regulate to how Psychologists advertise or describe themselves in public and professional arenas. Examples of the media that these guidelines might apply to include: business cards, letterhead, flyers for services or presentations, advertising listings (e.g. Yellow Pages) or advertisements for one-off services or events, websites, listings on directory websites, newspapers, television, etc.

#### **Key background issues**

1. The need for simple, uniform ways of presenting a Psychologist's qualifications so the public and other professionals can readily understand who this person is, and how they might differ from each other in their qualifications and expertise beyond the simple proposal to limit Specialist titles,
2. Increasing tendency in a more competitive and self-promoting market place for some psychologists to imply specialisation, qualifications or experience and expertise greater than is accurate an appropriate. For example, by including incomplete degrees in their postnominals (e.g. PhD(current)) or adopting the titles of honorary positions as if they were salaried, academic appointments, i.e. "Assoc. Prof")

#### **Aims of guidelines**

- a) Address current practices that are potentially or deliberately misleading to the public,
- b) Provide a uniform framework for how information about a psychologist is described so meaningful comparisons can be made by consumers and employers,
- c) improve the professional image of Psychologists by using consistent terminology and conventions about how information is provided that accurately and truthfully portrays the psychologist's expertise

#### **Guidelines**

##### **1. Levels of presenting information**

The following is suggested as a structure for how Psychologists present information about themselves and their qualification in public statements:

1. Primary Field:
  - a) professional title (if appl.),
  - b) name,
  - c) postnominals

e.g. *Dr. Mary Smith* or *Mary Smith BSc(Hons), DPsych*

2. Secondary Field:

- a. Specialist title (if applicable),

e.g. *Counselling Psychologist*

Self-ascribed specialist titles should be explicitly banned – e.g. “school psychologist, child psychologist”

3. Tertiary Field:

- a) appointments, e.g. “Professor of Psychology”
- b) employment position, e.g. “Director of...”
- c) other professions, e.g. “Psychotherapist, Social Worker”
- d) Primary, then non-primary professional association membership, e.g. “Member of the APS, and APS College of...”
- e) non-APAC accredited qualifications, e.g. “PhD in Theology”
- f) honorary positions, e.g. “Adjunct Lecturer”
- g) incomplete Psychology qualifications e.g. “candidate for PhD researching...”

*e.g. Director of Australian Consulting Pty Ltd. A member of the College of Counselling Psychologists of the APS, Dr Smith has a Masters degree in Family Therapy, is also a family therapist and is a member of the Aust Assoc of Family Therapists. She also holds the position of honorary Assoc. Professor, University of Sydney and is currently completing her Doctor of Philosophy studying ethical issues in how Psychologists present themselves in the public domain.*

## **2. Descriptive and specialist titles**

e.g. *Clinical Psychologist*

As proposed by the PBA, allow only specialist titles that can be justified by membership to an APS College (or equivalent). There should be a clear prohibition on self-declared, pseudo-specialist titles, e.g. those that don't align to APS Colleges or commonly accepted specialist areas, e.g. “Adolescent Psychologist,” “Transpersonal Psychologist.” That is, only “Psychologist” or prescribed specialist titles. However, I suggest, it would be acceptable to say “Counselling Psychologist specialising in clinical disorders” as the word “clinical” clearly is separate from the title.

## **3. Title of “Child Psychologist”**

I suggest that the PBA give consideration to including the title of “Child Psychologist” as this is a commonly used title by lay-people and holds inherent specialist meaning. I suggest that Specialist Educational & Developmental Psychologists and Specialist Clinical Psychologists with at least a Masters degree in Ed. & Devel. Psychology be allowed to include the term “Child” in their title: For example: “Clinical Child Psychologist” or “Child & Educational Psychologist”

## **4. Postnomial Formulae**

Within the Primary Field defined above, based on Mick Symons' 2005 InPsych article, I suggest there should be a uniform format for this. For example, the highest degree only or chronological list in order of status of the qualification. The correct/accurate university abbreviation (a list of which could be held and maintained by the PBA), and appropriate use of descriptor in brackets. Creative variant such as “BA(Psych)” should be banned, and only APAC accredited qualifications (no non-psychology qual.s), be allowed in the Primary (postnomial) Field (see above). Honorary degrees should not be included in postnomials. Non-Psychology associations should not be permitted (e.g.

“MACE”) as a postnominal nor APS College abbreviations, e.g. “CCP” (but can be described in the Tertiary Field),

**5. Incomplete / candidature qualifications**

Should not be used in postnominals at all, but may be descriptively referred to in the Tertiary Field using full words, not abbreviated letters, and it must be clear that the qualification has not been completed or achieved.

**6. Non-APAC accredited qualifications**

Such qualifications should not be included as postnominals but could be described to in the Tertiary Field, being clear that these are not psychology qualifications. e.g. PhDs that have not been assessed as a field of psychology, BSW, MFamTher, etc. – see Koocher & Keith-Spiegel (1998), p268.

**7. Professional Associations and College Membership**

Additional professions, e.g. “Psychotherapist,” “Social Worker” should only be described in the Tertiary Field. Only FAPS/MAPS/HMAPS can be used as postnominals and only if registered psychologists (see Koocher & Keith-Spiegel (1998), p267). Non-psychologist may not use them as postnominals. Non-psychologist FAPS/MAPS/HMAPS can describe their membership in the Tertiary Field. All non-APS professional association memberships should be described in the Tertiary Field.

**8. Honorary positions**

Typically, adjunct university positions, it should be clear whether any titles, positions or qualifications have been earned or have been bestowed. Honorary degrees, adjunct positions, non-salaried fellowships, etc. should not be used as pre-fix or titles in Primary or Secondary Fields, but could be described in the Tertiary Field. See case study on p270 Koocher & Kieth-Spiegel (1998).

**9. MAPS / FAPS as postnominals by non-psychologists**

As above, FAPS/MAPS can be used as postnominals and only if the person is a fully registered psychologist. Non-psychologist members may not use them as postnominals.

**10. Positions in professional bodies**

Reference to affiliations, honorary or consulting positions, should not be used in advertising professional services or presenting oneself to the public, as this implies endorsement of expertise from that body. For example, “Official Ambassador of...” The VPRB currently prohibits this.

**11. Describing work experience**

In terms of years of experience, statements about a psychologist’s work history should state clearly and unambiguously the composite years that person has been a fully registered psychologist. It is common to see psychologists not differentiating time in a field of work from time when one was actually fully registered and practicing as a Psychologist.

E.g. “*John Smith is a registered psychologist and has been working in the drug and alcohol field for over 20 years,*” or “*Dr Smith has been a Psychologist and worked with couples and families for over 20 years.*” Often, such statements are made by people who may have only been fully registered for a couple of years, but the statement leads people to believe they were fully registered for the whole of this time.

**References**

Koocher, G.P. & Patricia Keith-Spiegel, P. (1998). *Ethics in Psychology: Professional Standards and Cases*. Oxford University Press.

Symons, M. (2005, Dec.). Proper use of postnominals, *InPsych*, p33.