

Discussion Document – Psychology Titles

APEX has recently received for consultation two documents relating to the titles of consultant and senior psychologists from Canterbury and the formerly Central Region (Capital & Coast, Hutt, Midcentral, Whanganui, Hawke’s Bay and Wairarapa).

Current Definitions

The 2021-2023 APEX Psychologists MECA states at clause 2.0 “interpretations/definitions”:

“Senior Psychologist” means a person who satisfies the scope of practise requirements as per the “Psychologist” definition, holds an annual practising certificate and has had the equivalent of not less than 3 full-time years practical experience post registration as a qualified psychologist.

(Senior Psychologists practise at an advanced level, and are able to supervise other Psychologists).

“Consultant Psychologist” means a person who satisfies the scope of practice requirements, as per the “Psychologist” definition in this clause, holds an annual practicing certificate and who has had the equivalent of not less than 8 years practical experience post registration as a qualified Psychologist.

(Consultant Psychologists practise at an advanced to expert level, are able to supervise others and have some focus on overall service improvement e.g. through research, quality improvement initiatives, new service initiatives, workforce development).

It also states in clause 3.0, **“Note: the title of Senior and Consultant Psychologist has no linkage to salary”**.

History of the Definitions

The definitions of these titles has evolved over time. In the first APEX collective agreement for psychologists at Lakes DHB in 2003 – 2004 defined the roles:

“Senior Psychologist” means a person registered as a psychologist under the Psychologists Act 1981 (or any relevant Act passed in substitution) who holds a current practising certificate (or equivalent) and an acceptable degree and who, under professional supervision, has had not less than 5 years practical experience in clinical psychology in an appropriate setting. Senior Psychologists may also hold the additional qualification of ‘Post Graduate Diploma of Clinical Psychology’ (or an acceptable equivalent, such as, ‘Doctor of Clinical Psychology’). Senior Psychologists may also hold the additional title of Professional Advisor or Professional Leader.

“Consultant Psychologist” means a person registered as a psychologist under the Psychologists Act 1981 (or any relevant Act passed in substitution) who holds a current practising certificate (or equivalent) and an acceptable degree and who, under professional supervision, has had not less than 8 years practical experience in clinical psychology in an appropriate setting. Consultant Psychologists may also hold the additional qualification of ‘Post Graduate Diploma of Clinical Psychology’ (or an acceptable equivalent, such as, ‘Doctor of Clinical Psychology’). Consultant Psychologists may also hold the additional title of Professional Advisor or Professional Leader.

There was also a pay scale in the contract as shown to the right.

Intern	Psychologist	Senior	Consultant
			80917**
			78988**
			77172**
			75299**
			73426
			71554
		69707**	69681
		67905**	67908
		66009**	65935
		64114	
		62218	
		60322	
		58427	
	57425	56531	
	55751		
	54079		
	52405		
50733	50733		
49060			
46920			
45483			
44048			
42614			
41255			
38945			

The collective also defined:

(e) Entry to the Senior Psychologist scale will be based on the ability to discharge the range of duties of a Psychologist as demonstrated on an annual basis through satisfactory performance appraisals, plus at least 5 years practical experience as a Psychologist.

(f) Entry to the Consultant Psychologist scale will be based on demonstrated ability to perform at an expert level, at least 3 years practical experience as a Senior Psychologist and other criteria as developed and agreed between the parties during the term of this agreement.

When the first APEX Psychologists MECA was formed in 2006, covering Counties Manukau, Waikato, bay of Plenty, Midcentral, Lakes and Whanganui the salary scale became the now familiar auto then merit step scale.

The definitions included were:

“Senior Psychologist” means a person who satisfies the scope of practise requirements as above, holds an annual practising certificate and has had the equivalent of not less than 3 full-time years practical experience post registration as a qualified psychologist.

(Senior Psychologists practise at an advanced level, and are able to supervise other Psychologists).

“Consultant Psychologist” means a person who satisfies the scope of practice requirements, as above, holds an annual practicing certificate and who has had the equivalent of not less than 8 years practical experience post registration as a qualified Psychologist. (Access to the Consultant Psychologist title is by appointment or criteria depending upon the individual DHB requirements)

(Consultant Psychologists practise at an advanced to expert level, are able to supervise others and have some focus on overall service improvement e.g. through research, quality improvement initiatives, new service initiatives, workforce development).

When the 2007 – 2010 MECA was settled the definitions became:

“Senior Psychologist” means a person who satisfies the scope of practise requirements as per the “Psychologist” definition, holds an annual practising certificate and has had the equivalent of not less than 3 full-time years practical experience post registration as a qualified psychologist.

(Senior Psychologists practise at an advanced level, and are able to supervise other Psychologists).

“Consultant Psychologist” means a person who satisfies the scope of practice requirements, as per the “Psychologist” definition in this clause, holds an annual practicing certificate and who has had the equivalent of not less than 8 years practical experience post registration as a qualified Psychologist.

(Consultant Psychologists practise at an advanced to expert level, are able to supervise others and have some focus on overall service improvement e.g. through research, quality improvement initiatives, new service initiatives, workforce development)

Two things to observe about this history. First that the title of senior psychologist has never been dependent upon any application. And the only change has been a change from five years practical experience and to three full time years. Second, the use of the consultant term has different permutations in different districts. When the MECA was formed in 2006 some, but not all DHBs had specific criteria for entry to the consultant title. In 2007, the note on individual DHB requirements was removed. However each DHB has a slightly different approach to the use of these titles.

Seniority in Other Collective Agreements

The APEX Psychotherapy MECA covering Auckland and Waitemata Districts, 2021 to 2022 defines: “**Senior psychotherapist** is a psychotherapist with more than five years full time experience.”

The NZNO MECA defines a “**Senior Nurses or Midwives**” means a nurse or midwife who is appointed by a DHB into a designated senior position and is paid on the scale at 8.0.3.”

The MERAS MECA defines a “**Senior Midwife**” means a registered midwife who is appointed to a designated senior midwifery position which has defined responsibilities.”

The NZRDA MECA has a definition of a **Senior House Officer** as someone placed in a position of senior house officer and with more than two years house officer experience.

And “**Senior Registrars**, are those Registrars in an advanced training programme who have passed their Part I exams or equivalent, and who are on Step 4 or higher on the Registrar scale.”

The ASMS collective agreement for Senior Medical and Dental Officers does not define a senior medical officer, but defines a “**Medical Specialist** means any medical practitioner who is vocationally registered by the Medical Council under the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 in one of the approved branches of medicine and who is employed in either that branch of medicine or in a similar capacity with minimal oversight.” The MECA also carries an implied definition that a senior medical officer is any medical officer who is not a registrar or house officer.

Consultation Documents

The Canterbury Consultation document was sent to us on 4 October 2022 and suggests an interpretation which would require psychologists to apply for both senior and consultant titles and to provide evidence of experience as a psychologist/clinical psychologist, satisfactory annual performance review, evidence of practice with reference to Schedule C: Core Competencies for Psychologists of the MECA,

The Central Region document was sent on 9 September 2022 to us and suggests a requirement to apply for the senior and consultant title.

Both documents seem to expect that a psychologist will be performing at the level of senior or consultant psychologist before applying for the title.

Both processes would require a large volume of documentation and a significant investment in time and resources (especially at psychology and Allied Health leadership level) for what is in essence a classification issue.

Interpretations and Views on Psychology Titles

There has always been a range of interpretations of the consultant title process across DHBs. Some DHBs have not allowed the title, some DHBs have had it automatic after 8 years' experience and some DHBs have had a formal or informal process of application to the consultant title.

The senior psychologist title has however never required an application as far as we are aware.

There are a range of views on these titles from APEX members including:

- Consultant title is important to recognition of comparable skills/experience to SMOs and indicates experience when dealing with outside agencies (universities, courts, other health agencies);
- Senior title should be at more than 3 years full time experience;
- Employers are not the right organisation to determine consultant title (cf Medical Colleges and Fellowship);
- Having to apply for the title is a lot of work when there are already APR, CCP and merit progression processes;
- Titles are not important.

Options Going Forward

As we move to Te Whatu Ora we need national consistency. We can go along with the approach of having each title by application which seems like a squandering of resources or we can insist on automatic advancement to the titles senior and consultant at three and nine years respectively.

Another potential option for a nationally consistent approach to these titles which conserves scarce psychology resources would be as follows:

- The title of senior psychologist remain an automatic title but be used only after completion of five years' experience as a registered psychologist, and the MECA be amended in 2023 to provide for this.
- The title of consultant psychologist should going forward (grandparenting any current practice) become a title applicable to psychologists on steps 11 and above. This would prevent the double up of assessing competency against Schedule C in a merit and title application – i.e. assessing whether an employee is “undertaking work at the level expected of a senior practitioner”; and the MECA be amended in 2023 to provide for this. An interview with a senior colleague could be used.