



Introducing our APEX delegate for Bay of Plenty District Health Board

Kia ora my name is Simon Seal and I have recently taken on the role of psychology delegate for the Bay of Plenty District Health Board (BOPDHB). I am a NZ Registered Clinical Psychologist and have been with the BOPDHB for approximately 4 ½ years now. I have previously worked in Intellectual Disability, Child and Adolescent, and Adult Community Mental Health Services, and I am enjoying my current role in Mental Health Services for Older People (MHSOP) at Tauranga Hospital where I have been working for just over a year.

My current interests include neuropsychology, professional ethics, and the burgeoning field of cognitive and behavioural therapies and how these apply to older populations. Working with older people also provides a unique opportunity to examine fascinating areas such as ageing and cognitive decline, the dementias, adjustment, grief and loss, as well as later-life and existential issues.

Through my new role as an APEX psychology delegate I have gained a greater appreciation of the broader systemic issues that are related to working within the public health system and how we are represented as a group. Psychologists play an important role within the various teams and departments that we work in and I think that it is vital that we have a unified voice on matters which we value. I am looking forward to continuing in my role and working with our members in liaison with APEX in order to advocate for our profession.

Vulnerable Children's Bill

The Vulnerable Children's Bill had its first reading on 17 September 2013. Amid the various submissions made about the bill the general consensus was that something needed to be done about the gross level of child abuse in New Zealand. Statistics from the year ending June 2012 showed that there were 22 000 verified incidents of child abuse in New Zealand and that as many as 10 children die every year as a result of abuse in the home.

APEX supports the aim of the bill and supports the protection it intends to provide children. However the concern we have is what the legislation intends to impose on existing and potential employees working in the children's workforce. Specifically the bill proposes to apply vetting and screening or "safety checks" on existing and potential employees in order to determine if they may or may not pose a risk to children.

The vetting and screening process will involve the use of prescribed risk assessment evaluations to be carried out on potential employees by an employer, to determine the suitability of a person to be employed in a position working with children. A decision whether or not to recruit a potential employee for a position working with children will therefore depend on an employer's interpretation and application of a risk assessment evaluation, which runs the risk of being based on opinions and assumptions made by an employer, who is influenced by their own prejudices and biases. Such an assessment, realistically should be carried out by someone with an appropriate 'psychology' background and the assessments should be based on appropriate psychological criteria to make the appropriate determination.

Further the children's workforce is not where the majority of child abuse occurs so there is a lack of

compelling evidence to support that vetting and screening of existing and potential employees working directly with children, will in fact reduce child abuse. The bureaucratic costs associated with implementing a vetting and screening process for existing and potential employees, is therefore disproportionate to the perceived actual benefit it will have on reducing child abuse in New Zealand.

We already have regulatory bodies in place to vet and screen the suitability of candidates for registration in the children's workforce. Therefore we believe a separate screening service is unnecessary and increases the workload and costs associated with recruiting employees.

Investigation meetings – the do's and the don'ts

During the course of your employment you may face the prospect of being involved in a disciplinary process. Each employer is responsible for carrying out its own disciplinary procedures by following a prescribed policy in regard to how these procedures are to be conducted. In general they should always begin with an investigation meeting.

In order for an investigation meeting to be initiated by an employer, you should first be notified in **writing** that either a complaint has been made against you or that there has been an allegation made against you. The complaint or allegation can be for example an issue with the manner in which you performed your duties, your behaviour towards a patient or it could be an allegation of serious misconduct. For simplicity we will refer to the notification as 'the complaint'.

It is understandable that the immediate reaction to these notifications are

feelings of anger, injustice and fear. This is a normal reaction to an incredibly stressful situation. However what can happen is emotions fuel you to vent your feelings to whoever will listen in order to justify your position. You talk to your colleagues about the injustices that you are facing and human resources or managers are contacted to try and 'resolve' the matter before it can be taken any further.

Our advice to you when you are faced with a complaint or allegation that has been made against you is: **do not** discuss the matter with any other person in your workplace. Do not discuss the matter with managers', with human resources, colleagues or any other staff member in your place of employment. The reason is that you are reacting emotionally to the situation. When you react emotionally your decisions are based on your feelings as opposed to the facts and can be to your detriment. Your employer is interested in the facts and you should only provide them with the facts. An emotional reaction is often accompanied by 'loose lips' and too much, often irrelevant information being disclosed which can detract from the matter at hand and exacerbate the allegations made against you.

Instead take some time to absorb that you have had a complaint made against you and do not instantly react. Being notified that there is a pending investigation with regard to a complaint does not mean the complaint has any basis or validity. Contact APEX to discuss the complaint, we can help you put things in perspective and offer support, advice and guidance on how to deal with this stressful situation. Further discussing the matter with APEX will give you an opportunity to vent your feelings and allows you time to process what has happened.

In regard to managing the complaint, your first course of action is making sure that you have all the information in regard to the complaint from your employer. Get a clear explanation of what the allegations are, before agreeing to have any meetings scheduled to discuss them. This point cannot be

emphasised enough! Gather all the evidence your employer intends to use to justify the complaint made against you. APEX can assist you in gathering this information.

You are entitled to know exactly why your employer is carrying out an investigation process. Therefore request that your employer provide all the evidence pertaining to the complaint, ask your employer to provide a copy of the complaint, examples of incidents complained of, dates, times and relevant information about all the parties involved in the matter. Further always ask for your employer's policies with regard to their disciplinary procedures and make sure you understand how your employer is required to carry out their own procedure.

Do not accept a notification that does not spell out exactly why you are being investigated. Having all the pertinent information affords you an opportunity to prepare a response to your employer that specifically addresses the complaint made against you. You will have a clear perspective on the matters that need to be discussed and what information you need to disclose during the course of the investigation. An investigation meeting should not be used as a 'fishing expedition' to gather all and any information from you. The information disclosed at the investigation meeting will determine whether further action is taken by your employer, so what you disclose needs to be accurate and relevant.

Merit step progression

Merit step progression is initiated when you reach step 9 on the APEX salary scale. Step 9 is generally reached in your 9th year of practice from the time you are fully registered as a psychologist. Once on step 9 you can apply for merit step progression at any time and your application is dependent on the completion of requisite core and optional tasks.

The MECA does not specify that you are required to be on step 9 for any particular amount of time prior to applying for merit step progression however you can only apply once a year. Therefore it is important that you meet the necessary criteria by completing the required core and optional tasks, before putting in your application. Your employer is required to give your application genuine consideration before deciding whether to accept or decline it.

Your employer would have to assess your application and agree that you have met the appropriate criteria in order to determine if you will be able to move up to a merit step or not. If your application is successful you will be backdated to the date your application was received by your employer. If your application is unsuccessful you will have an opportunity to have the decision reviewed.

Did you know?

You want more choices than you can process.



In a study carried out outside a supermarket, researchers set up a tasting table with 6 varieties of jam. This table was alternated with a larger selection of 24 jams. What was discovered was that although more people stopped to taste the jams at the 24 jam table, 6 times more people purchased jams from the 6 jam table. This can be attributed to the fact that although we think we want more, our brains can only handle so much input at a time.

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