

EDITORIALS

Editorial: Setting Standards, Shifting Paradigms

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Keywords: industry standards, peer-reviewed journal, open access, Psychotherapy and Counselling Journal of Australia, PACJA, national standards, lived experience, peak bodies, Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia, PACFA

<https://doi.org/10.59158/001c.84211>

Psychotherapy and Counselling Journal of Australia

Vol. 11, Issue 1, 2023

In arguably a watershed year for counselling, psychotherapy, and Indigenous healing practices in Australia, this issue of the *Psychotherapy and Counselling Journal of Australia (PACJA)* is the first since it moved to the Scholastica platform. The move is helping *PACJA* meet international standards for peer-reviewed journals, in terms of discoverability, design, device-friendly pages, and other features. It comes at a time when the Australian Government has announced funding for the development of national standards for psychotherapists and counsellors, and for two independent peak bodies representing people who live with mental ill health and their carers and kin. This editorial details the articles in Volume 11 (1) of *PACJA* which emphasise the paradigm shifts accompanying these announcements.

Welcome to the first issue of the *Psychotherapy and Counselling Journal of Australia (PACJA)* since it moved to the Scholastica platform to ensure it meets the latest industry standards for high-quality, peer-reviewed journals. Scholastica is a frontrunner in metadata standards, which means *PACJA*'s open access journal website is now search engine optimised. Readers will benefit from *PACJA*'s elevated discoverability, attractive design, mobile-friendly pages, and features such as the search option (by keyword and article type). Authors and reviewers will experience a more transparent, intuitive, and efficient peer review and publishing process.

National standards will also be established for counsellors and psychotherapists following the allocation in the May 2023 Federal Budget of \$300,000 over two years to develop a baseline for qualifications, supervision, continuing professional development, and oversight (Department of Health and Aged Care, 2023). This complies with recommendations in November 2021 by the Select Committee into Mental Health and Suicide Prevention endorsed by the Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA, 2021). Such regulation will ensure quality, safety, and confidence in the use of psychotherapists and counsellors at a time when their services are desperately needed across a range of mental health settings (Bloch-Atefi et al., 2021). It will also formalise psychotherapy and counselling as distinct national professions and potentially enable their inclusion in the Medicare Benefits Scheme and more Primary Health Networks.

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Thus, it is timely that training standards, scopes of practice, and employability are addressed in Nathan Beel's (2023) article "More Than Just Counselling: Australian Counsellor Job Advertisement Trends". Beel's content analysis compares current employer expectations of counsellors with employer expectations between 1984 and 1990 when the last study on this topic was conducted (Franklin et al., 1994). While both studies found that counsellors were expected to undertake a broad range of responsibilities other than solely counselling, Beel's (2023) study highlights new counsellor specialisations, such as gambling, domestic violence, and trauma, which had been unidentified in the previous study.

Earlier this year, the Australian Government pledged \$7.5 million to establish and run two independent peak bodies—one for those who live with mental ill health and one for their carers, families, and kin. The funding will give a voice to those with lived experience of mental ill health and their carers and loved ones in government decisions affecting them. Collaborating with people with lived experience is a central theme in five of this issue's articles. "Interest, Enablement, Joy, and Meaning: Listening for What's Life Enhancing About Sharing Our Stories Through Art" by PACFA's College of Creative and Experiential Therapies convenor, Carla van Laar (2023), is based on her innovative doctoral research. Including women as co-inquirers, van Laar reflects on "why deep listening is important in research and in practice . . . in the context of the changing political landscape of mental health in the Australian service system".

Like van Laar (2023), Adrian Holmes et al. (2023) question the dominance of the biomedical model and the concept of individual pathology in "How We Got Here: A Contextual Review of the Better Access Initiative". Examining the global and national origins of Australia's Better Access, Holmes et al. (2023) call for a radical shift in how governments approach mental health policy to consider socioeconomic, geographical, and cultural determinants of distress, struggle, mental health, wellbeing, and therapy. Part of this paradigm shift involves exploring policy ideas other than clinical responses, including counselling, psychotherapy, and Indigenous healing practices, to ensure a more equitable and holistic service.

Similarly, Gina Kezelman (2023) advocates for a biopsychosocial approach in the article "In Conversation With Chronic Pain: An Integrative Framework for Understanding and Treating Chronic Pain". Considering the intersection of attachment, trauma, and pain, Kezelman applies a relational lens to support a psychodynamic framework, given weak to modest evidence for cognitive behavioural therapy in the management of persistent pain. Likewise, Andrea Stafford (2023) recommends relationship therapists view neurodiverse relationships through a cultural lens and avoid viewing autism as a deficit in "Relationship-Counselling Recommendations for Partnerships Involving Autistic Adults: A Scoping Review". Finally, Grant T. Ryan (2023) relates the co-authoring of a *Dungeons and Dragons*-style campaign with his 12-year-old client. Incorporating narrative play therapy and symbolic analysis, "The

Wand in the Well: A Tabletop Role-Playing Campaign in a Child Protection Context” (Ryan, 2023) explores how the campaign was played by family members and the counsellor as co-creator and dungeon master.

In contrast to some of the more qualitative studies in this issue, the quantitative design of “The Impact of Ruminative Thinking on Verbal and Visual Task Performance” (Johnman & Boschen, 2023) reflects *PACJA*’s broad methodological scope. It also demonstrates a willingness to publish negative results—an increasing trend, particularly in open access journals, and one that contributes to unbiased science (Enago Academy, 2022; Mouchet et al., 2022).

Rounding out this issue are two book reviews. Aptly emphasising a paradigm shift is Joseph Ciarrochi’s (2023) review of *Learning Process-Based Therapy: A Skills Training Manual for Targeting the Core Processes of Psychological Change in Clinical Practice* (Hofmann et al., 2021). According to Ciarrochi (2023), the authors (who are the founders of process-based therapy) “introduce the practitioner to radically new ways of thinking about clinical problems [and] do not advocate for a particular type of therapy”. Rather than the decades-old “protocol-for-syndrome approach”, evidence-informed processes guide a revolutionary integrative, “meta” approach so that practitioners “can focus flexibly on the processes most needed by the client” (Ciarrochi, 2023).

Compassion focused therapy founder Paul Gilbert’s (2023) review of *Choose Compassion: Why It Matters and How It Works* (Kirby, 2022) complements the theme of honouring lived experience, given his definition of compassion as “a sensitivity to suffering in self and others, with a commitment to try to alleviate and prevent it” (Gilbert, 2014, p. 19). Citing neuroscientific and other evidence, Kirby (2022) maintains that compassion is the most important human motivation in a world struggling with pandemics, climate change, mass extinctions, genocide, wars, and human callousness.

This issue would not have been possible without the generous support of PACFA, the PACFA research committee, *PACJA* editorial board, authors, peer reviewers, copyeditors, Scholastica staff, and other individuals, not least including designer Linda McLaughlan and volunteer Annie Whamond. It is an exciting time for the profession and for *PACJA*, and the current issue certainly reflects this.

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