

5 February 2014

Mr Anthony Jordan
fyi-request-1398-1493c63b@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear Mr Jordan

Official Information Act Request

I refer to your request of 10 January 2014, seeking the following information.

- ACC clarification of the following terms:
 - *Disability*
 - *Impartial*
 - *Independent*

- ACC's *understanding* of the following neurological specialists, qualifications, or scopes of practice:
 - *Neurologist*
 - *Neuro-Psychiatrist*
 - *Neuro-Psychologist*
 - *Neuro-Psychotherapist*

- If the above specialist scopes can be *substituted by another vendor of different qualification and experience*.

The following information is provided under the Official Information Act 1982.

Terms

Disability

Previous legislation has included a definition of "disability". However, the current legislation does not define "disability". The Accident Compensation Act 2001 (Act) focuses on personal injury, impairment, rehabilitation, and independence in everyday areas of functioning such as domestic activities and mobility. The term "disability" is used in relation to services for serious injury clients who have a permanent impairment from their injury which impacts on their ability to perform everyday activities.

Impartial and independent

Current legislation and policy does not include a definition of impartial or independent. However, health practitioner conduct will be regulated by each profession's professional ethics, standards, or codes of conduct. Various parts of the Act identify the need to act independently in specific contexts. For example, section 138 of the Act refers to acting independently with respect to reviewers.

Neurological Specialists

Please note that ACC is not responsible for defining scopes of practice for specialist positions. Scopes of practice are prescribed by the Medical Council of New Zealand pursuant to the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003. However, the specialist terms you have noted can be described as follows.

Neurologist

A neurologist is a medical specialist with specialist training as a neurological physician. This will have involved approximately 13 years of training. Neurologists work with people who have developmental or acquired nerve conditions in the brain, spinal cord or body.

Neuro-psychiatrist

A neuro-psychiatrist is a medical specialist with specialist training and vocational registration in psychiatry. This will have involved approximately 13 years of training. Neuro-psychiatry is not one of the specialist areas of psychiatry described by the Australian College of Psychiatry. However, some psychiatrists have also taken a strong professional interest in brain injury and neurology or may have additional physician qualifications in neurology. Despite this, the Medical Council will have the scope recorded as "psychiatry".

Neuro-psychiatrist's are able to prescribe medications while neuro-psychologists cannot. However, neuro-psychiatrists do not carry out extensive cognitive and/or personality assessment as this is the domain of neuro-psychologists.

Neuro-psychologist

A neuro-psychologist is a psychologist with additional training in the assessment and treatment of people with acquired or developmental neurological conditions. Neuro-psychological assessments form an important component of describing an individual's function and also facilitate a more accurate diagnosis of mental health and neurological conditions. Neuro-psychologists are "clinical psychologists" and more information can be found on the New Zealand Psychological Society website.

Neuro-psychotherapist

ACC is unable to provide a description of the specialisation of neuro-psychotherapy, as it is a new field of psychotherapy in New Zealand. Neuro-psychotherapy is not currently funded as a separate discipline to the specialisation of psychotherapy.

ACC funds neuropsychological assessments, neuropsychiatry assessments, and neurologist assessments as well as clinical psychologists and psychotherapists.

Specialist substitution

There are some common areas of knowledge between a psychiatrist and a neuropsychologist because both specialisations have in-depth training in mental health. However, there are also differences in that a psychologist cannot prescribe medication whereas a psychiatrist can. A neuro-psychologist can provide comprehensive cognitive assessments whereas a neuro-psychiatrist can not because most do not have the requisite training. A neurologist would be operating outside their scope of practice if they were to give specialist advice on mental health issues. ACC considers the appropriateness of specialist referrals on a case by case basis.

Please contact me on adam.houppermans@acc.co.nz if you would like to discuss this letter. I will be happy to answer any questions or, if you have any concerns, work with you to resolve these.

If you are still not happy, you may make a complaint to the Office of the Ombudsman. You can call them on 0800 802 602, 9am to 5pm weekdays, or write to:

The Office of the Ombudsman
P O Box 10 152
WELLINGTON 6143

Yours sincerely



Adam Houppermans
Advisor