

Dear Sir / Madam,

Re : Professional qualification verification of psychologists in Hong Kong

I write to express my opinions on the above issue. A few days ago, I read from newspaper that 心理學會臨床心理學組, and the 臨床心理學博士協會 is having different opinions on the above issue. I am supporting 心理學會臨床心理學組 for setting standard benchmarks when approving professional qualification for psychologist to practice in Hong Kong.

I am a mother of 2, my boy is now 9 years old and is autistic. He is a disability card holder. My girl is 7 years old and is dyslexic. I got my divorce 6 years ago and that created mental trauma on my boy. All these drove me to look for a professional psychologist, which was a very painstaking and money-wasting process.

I first mention how I searched for a psychologist. I did not go to the public hospital or other government-run organizations as the lines were so long. I wanted a private practice psychologist. The problem was, where to find a qualified one. I could not just ask a friend to refer me a good one. No one knew who and how. So, I needed to google on the Internet. A lot of ads coming up and the next question was, which one to choose? I then searched the keyword “註冊心理學家”, I remembered I found a list, which made me very confused. There were hundreds of names and phone numbers. I tried to call a few ones and found that they were either employed by government hospitals, schools associations or other organizations, or they were doing private practice but I had no way to find their qualifications. I could not research on each and every one of them. Therefore, I could only screen by 1) descriptions on their websites, like whether the psychologist had the experience of counselling an autistic child, 2) their proclaimed qualifications, to my mind, a doctorate degree holder should be better. Yet, I had no way to verify and it was all blind-trusting.

The result was, I found I had dragged myself into a lot of undesirable consequences, or if I may be excused, I would use the word ‘traps’. Many “Dr” are from overseas institutions, for which I never heard of and never could find a way to verify whether their qualifications were true or not. There was no word of mouth, and there was no standard of professionalism benchmark to refer to. I met “Dr” psychologist who turned out asking me to buy natural supplements;

I met 'Dr' who ask my son, who was only 4 at that time, to do things like eye movements and meditation for an hour; I met 'Dr' who asked my sons to do assessments for which I never heard of and for queer reasons like testing his level of fright. I was sensible enough to stop those "treatments" at the right time to prevent any harm done on my son. Yet, I spent a fortune and wasted my son's time for his golden treatment period.

To draw lessons from my experience :

- 1) I think many Hong Kong citizens are as ignorant as I was – it is quite common to call the psychologist 心理醫生. Not everyone knows that we should address them 心理學家. And the word 'Doctor' in Chinese means both 醫生 and 博士. This makes the title very misleading. I never met a 'Dr' psychologist calling himself / herself in Chinese. In their clinics, they are all addressed as Dr. X, not X 先生 / X 博士, which gives the misleading impression that they are X 醫生. The general public believes that 醫生 are professionals and should be trusted. Without a statutory organization to safeguard the qualifications of the practitioners, there is no measure to prevent practitioners from manipulating the misconception about their titles and the trust misplaced. Moreover, being called Doctor does not mean that they really have the required professionalism and ethics. We all know the fact that many Doctors got their titles from different overseas institutions, for which the standard varies. We are talking about entrusting children to the hands of these people. It is definitely the HK Government's responsibility to set a gate to exclude those who do not qualify and to prevent those 'Doctor' titles from being purposefully used to mislead the public.
- 2) I cannot see any point in accusing 心理學會臨床心理學組 of being "exclusive". Actually, professional attainment assessments are used in many other fields. Take myself as an example. I got my Master of English degree in UK. My university is not very well known. When I came back to Hong Kong to teach, I took the Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers to prove that I met the Language Proficiency Requirement. I regard taking the assessment as a way to prove myself qualified. I do not see the assessments as a way to protect the interests of the current teachers. Nor do I feel any 'disrespect' or 'being targeted'. The assessment is a way for those who work in the field to show being responsible to parents and children. Simple as that.

To conclude, setting up professional standard requirements is for the protection of the children and the general public. Complicating and distracting the matter by all other accusations is meaningless. Without a proper screening and registration system, it is the parents and children who suffer. With growing awareness and growing number of SEN students, with growing complexity of our society, the demand for real professional psychologists is higher than ever. Desperate parents can be easily manipulated. The interests of the children should by no means be compromised because of the esteem of a small group of people. It is about the well-being and future of our children, which the government should exercise highest degree of prudence.

Thank you very much for your attention. I am willing to be contacted if any of my opinions need further discussions.

Yours faithfully,

Winki CHAN

Tel : [REDACTED]

Email : [REDACTED]