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Research Director
Health and Ambulance Services Committee
Parliament House
George St
Brisbane Qld 4000

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Mental Health Bill

I am writing to you to express my very grave concerns for the section in this Bill that will allow children to undergo electroconvulsive treatment (ECT) against their parents' wishes, or for children to consent to it against their parents' wishes.

I have very long experience in psychiatry and have published extensively in the application of the philosophy of science to psychiatry. I am fully aware that the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) deems ECT an “essential” form of management [1] but this is false. Since I graduated in psychiatry in 1977, I have practised in public and in private sectors, in some of the most remote parts of this country, without using ECT. Twice when I was appointed head of department of psychiatric units in public hospitals, ECT was discontinued. Both times, the admission rate dropped, the duration of stay dropped and the bed occupancy rate dropped by over half.

To claim that ECT is essential is simply untrue. To say that children, who cannot own property, drive a car, have a firearm, open a bank account, vote, take a loan or hire purchase agreement, drink or engage

in sexual activity with a person as little as two months older, can give “informed consent” is a travesty. The fact that the child is being considered for ECT says that there is already something amiss with his mental function. The state's duty in this type of case is to increase the safeguards, not reduce them.

This must not be approved under any circumstances. The WHO says “There are no indications for the use of ECT on minors, and hence this should be prohibited through legislation.” The RANZCP has never disagreed with this but simply ignores it.

The section on psychosurgery will allow permanent implantation of electrodes in children provided they consent. The suggestion that mentally disordered children can give informed consent to such a procedure is beyond outrageous, it is culpable. I do not know who managed to convince the relevant committee to include this item but it has absolutely no scientific justification whatsoever. Deep brain stimulation is not an approved form of treatment in this country. In 2014, the Sax Institute in NSW was commissioned to investigate it and concluded: “There is insufficient evidence at this point in time to support the use of DBS as a clinical treatment for *any psychiatric disorder*” (emphasis added).

I should point out that on Saturday October 10th, the Qld Branch of RANZCP Section on Philosophy, History and Ethics of Psychiatry held a seminar on the topic “On the Nature of Mental Disorder.” The first speaker, from the Philosophy Dept at UQ, gave a paper entitled “On the Nature of Mind.” As the organiser, I had approached a number of the most senior researchers in Qld, and the Branch Committee, to find a psychiatrist to present a talk entitled “On the Nature of Mental Disorder: The Orthodox Psychiatric View.” The invitations went to people who are proud to boast that they have international reputations for basic research in psychiatry, who each year spend millions of dollars of government money on their projects, who are delighted to appear on television or opine for the daily press, and who have the ear of the government.

For the record, nobody accepted the invitation. It would seem that the same people who are very willing, even eager, to tell the community that their procedures are safe, reliable and effective aren't prepared to justify their actions in a critical setting. I do not believe that your committee should accept their advice at face value.

Also for the record, there is nothing a psychiatrist can say as a specialist physician that would justify relaxing the law regarding legal standing of minors in this way. It is a matter of opinion, not a matter of science.

I would be very pleased to elaborate in person on any point I have raised in this letter. I believe the matter is far too important to be left to a small, self-selected conclave providing advice that does not withstand public scrutiny.

Yours faithfully

A large black rectangular redaction box covers the signature area. To the left of the box, there is a faint blue ink mark that appears to be the start of a signature.

N McLaren