Caring for someone with depression: 
Attitudes and clinical practices of Australian mental health clinicians

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This thesis is submitted to the School of Psychology, University of Newcastle, in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctorate of Clinical Psychology
4th May, 2012
**Declaration**

1. *The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available to this loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.*

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3. *I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis contains a published paper of which I am a joint author. I have included as part of the thesis a written statement, endorsed by my supervisor, attesting to my contribution to the joint publication.*

4. *The work in this thesis was carried out under the supervision of Ms Katie McGill, Clinical Psychologist and Program Manager at the Hunter Institute of Mental Health; Associate Professor Jenny Bowman within the School of Psychology, The University of Newcastle; and Dr Peter Kelly, University of Wollongong.*

3. *The conduct of this research was approved by the Hunter New England Human Research Ethics Committee and the University of Newcastle Human Research Ethics Committee (approval number 10/11/17/5.08).*

Signed: ……………………………………. Date: …………………..
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Structured Abstract

**Background:** Family members and carers who support a person with depression are faced with specific challenges and are often significantly burdened as a result of the role. They report being dissatisfied with the inclusivity of, and support provided by, clinicians. There has been limited Australian research in this area and this is the first study to look at clinicians’ perspectives on providing support to family members and carers of people with depression in Australia. **Method:** One hundred and nineteen Australian mental health clinicians were surveyed regarding their attitudes towards and current clinical practices with family members and carers of people with depression. Participants comprised mental health clinicians who identified their primary client group as mental health consumers or family members and carers. Recruitment occurred via invitation to clinicians who attended training specific to providing support to family members and carers of people with depression (*Partners in Depression* (PID) program training) and clinicians who had not attended this training. Recruitment of these groups enabled comparisons to be made between groups to identify whether primary client group or training was related to differences in attitudes, perception of barriers or reported clinical practice. **Results:** Results indicated that the attitudes of clinicians towards family members and carers were generally positive, while the level of inclusive practice reported was variable. Providing family members and carers with an orientation to services and information on how to respond in crisis situations were two of the most frequently reported interventions. The sample identified a number of barriers to inclusive practice. Barriers were predominantly organisational in nature rather than clinician specific. Those who perceived more barriers also reported providing more clinical interventions to family members and carers of people with depression. In contrast, there was no relationship between reported attitudes and perceived barriers. While attitudes and barriers did not predict the inclusive clinical practice of those who worked directly with carers, there
was a significant relationship between perceived barriers and inclusive clinical practice for those who worked directly with family members and carers. **Conclusions:** It appears that in order for inclusive practice to occur more consistently there is a need for major organisational and systematic reform. Further research is necessary to explore the reasons why family members and carers are not routinely included in the care and treatment process for people with depression.
THESIS OVERVIEW

This thesis explores the attitudes of, perceived barriers to and actual clinical practices of Australian mental health clinicians supporting those who care for a person with depression. The first section provides an overview of the literature and evidence available about this topic. It also outlines the significance and aims of the study that was conducted to further investigate this topic. The second section of the thesis comprises a manuscript that describes the study and its findings. This manuscript was submitted to the Australian Journal of Psychology in June, 2012. It was accepted pending revisions, however due to external factors the requested changes were not able to be completed within the timeframe. The authors are now in the process of submitting the manuscript to other journals for publication consideration. The third section of the manuscript comprises an extended discussion which allows for further exploration and consideration of the results.