

Productivity Commission Submission

When I heard about child health screening for children age 0 to 3 I was thinking that was a pretty good idea, but then when I found out that Emotional Development was going to be screened for also, I became very concerned and a bit confused.

I can see how a doctor or trained medical professional could do some screening for physical signs of illness, like a fever or broken arm or high temperature, these can be objectively measured, but emotional development is another issue all together.

I was trained as a high school teacher and on my way through university I took a number of science and psychology classes and one thing I came away with was the stark difference between science and psychology.

In science you can do objective measurements like temperature or weight etc and things can be accurately and consistently measured, but trying to do a "measurement" in the psychological arena is always subjective and 100% inconsistent.

I can recall one experiment where they asked 5 psychiatrists to diagnosis 10 patients just by interviewing them. Half were normal and half were mental patients. The doctors for the most part could not tell the normal people from the patients and they had NO agreement as to what mental illness each person had. It was a shocking disaster for the the science of "mental diagnosis."

That experiment was with a group of adults who could communicate well. I can imagine how inconsistent the diagnosis will be for children zero to three.

Every day children are in different moods. I know that from raising 4 children and a bunch of grand kids and by observing my many cousins and other family members. Things like lack of sleep poor diet and other issues can cause a child to behave differently from hour to hour. And children are certainly changing from month to month as they grow up. So how can anyone make some accurate and meaningful determination as to the "emotional state" of a child. It is an absurd idea that children can be screened for "Emotional Development" as they are constantly changing and there is no worthwhile way to measure it anyway.

The other problem is if a child is labelled as a potential problem, what will happen? I know in today's Mental Health environment anyone can be whacked onto some form of medication if they are even suspected of having some emotional issues. The problem is the drugs do nothing except cover up symptoms, have some nasty side effects and are pretty much addictive.

So why bother?

What is the point of the screening for emotional development?

There is no way to do it accurately, children are constantly changing as they age.

So certainly screen and test for health issues but trying to screen for mental issues is like trying to catch a fly with chop sticks.