

PEER GROUP ACCREDITATION OF PSYCHOTHERAPISTS

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We are a group of psychotherapists who have met ten times in the last fifteen months to look at alternatives to being accredited other than those that seemed open to us of joining AHPP or BAC. As experienced therapists we all felt that we did not need to be accredited by an external body, but we wanted to incorporate some of the values around standards of practice that a more formal accreditation procedure aims to encourage. The issue of accreditation was the catalyst, but our intention was to broaden the concept to include career management; the balance of therapy and non-therapy time in our lives; our belief systems; how we nourish ourselves; and our life plans for the next year and how being a therapist fitted into those. In other words we wanted to take into account more of the whole person in their life context rather than just their work as therapist.

Depth of Feedback

One of the strengths of this group was that we had found a place where we could be lost, confused, inarticulate and risk the unknown. We had noticed that the process of accreditation often led us and others to hide the shadow side of ourselves. In our attempts to be accredited we can be tempted to give undue weight to our supposed strengths. At its worst this means leaving the pathology with the clients whose interests we are trying to protect. The more we have to convince external authorities of our achievements, whether it is hours of training with the right (i.e. accredited?) trainer or numbers of groups etc., as opposed to saying something like "I am on occasions full of rage and I don't always know how to bring this into the work creatively", the more this client/therapist split can develop. In fact we have discovered that our mistakes have been very creative and sometimes our supposed brilliance has depowered the client - a reminder that we often really do not know nearly as much about what we are doing as we would like to think. The level of contact and the quality of feedback we have been able to give each other has enhanced our self awareness and learning, and not led to the premature closure that a more formal accreditation procedure - even a renewable one - tends to encourage. In the ten meetings it is the amount of ongoing dialogue that has played a significant part in affecting both our personal and professional lives.

During this time we have looked at our learning needs and projects, shared our timetables so that we could challenge each other about our time management, given ourselves tasks between groups, defined criteria by which we wanted to assess ourselves and each other, looked at our strengths and weaknesses as therapists and our core beliefs which influence our work, and free associated around what we imagined to be our own and each others' darker sides.

We are aware that the topics we have covered and the model we have used has been useful to us at this stage of our careers. We have already had the experience of managing ourselves in peer groups and are lucky enough not to need clients or external validation. Nevertheless we would like to encourage more options on what we have found to be a very complex issue, as a supplement if not a replacement to existing methods of accreditation.

A NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ACCREDITATION

for psychotherapists and counsellors

organized by

THE NORWICH COLLECTIVE

at

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Accreditation confronts all psychotherapists and counsellors with personal, professional and political issues. It raises questions not only of how we practise but of how we relate as human beings.

This open forum will provide an opportunity to come together in an attractive setting in the hope of clarifying our confusion by exploring, through a series of experiential workshops and plenary sessions, the feelings and tensions inevitably evoked by this challenging subject.

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