

LETTERS

What Future for Therapists Struck off the List?

Dear David,

Thank you for your reply to my letter in the March issue. It was thoughtfully expressed. What I am now wondering is what provisions are made for therapists who may have been seen to have 'erred' but wish to continue practising under the auspices of their particular association. Are they permanently defrocked? Or is there provision for regaining entry to the fold through re-training, close supervision etc.

Regarding Shan Jayran's article (also in the March issue), I feel this just exacerbates the whole issue. Are we now in for a spate of therapist bashing by the media? Still I am glad you printed it. Perhaps I was being naive!

Jen Popkin, East Sussex

Dear Jen,

I think the AHP Practitioners group had better say how they care for, or take care of, members they 'expel' — to use their word. So I will ask their Chair, John Rowan to comment.

I notice that the BAC have ammended their professional code to say, in effect, that sexual intercourse between counsellors and ex-clients is usually inappropriate and only after a long time has elapsed since the counselling has been completed. Personally, I think something needs adding here about fantasy and intention. If the therapist or counsellor has fantasies about having sex with a client that in itself is abusive of the therapeutic transaction and damaging to clients whether or not the fantasies are ever acted on.

Yours, David Jones

Dear David

You passed on to us the query from Jen Popkin about the treatment of people who have been expelled. This was discussed at the Board meeting held yesterday. Let me quote two hypothetical cases.

Practitioner A is accused of professional misconduct. The case is proved to the satisfaction of the complaints subcommittee. The practitioner involved accepts the decision and expresses sincere contrition and a determination not to let the thing happen again. In such a case the person might be readmitted after a period of time in which there had been no suspicion of bad conduct, and where suitable supervision had been fully maintained.

Practitioner B is accused of professional misconduct. The case is proved to the satisfaction of the complaints subcommittee. The practitioner involved admits nothing, complains about the procedure, does not attend at meetings set up, and generally acts in a defensive manner. In such a case it might be quite difficult to find any way in which the person could get back in.

Of course there are many other possibilities, and each one would have to be considered on its merits. But the general principle, of either generally respecting the organization and its procedures, or not doing so, would apply quite generally as a criterion of how easy it would be to readmit the person. In the more extreme of these cases, of course, the person might not want to be readmitted to an organization for which there was no respect.

In any case, of course, there is no way of stopping a person from practising as a counsellor — merely that they can no longer quote AHPP accreditation as a recommendation.

Hope this clarifies the matter.

John Rowan, Chair for the AHPP Board

Are Therapists Dentists?

Dear David,

I can't let one statement in Richard and Sheena's article on training and accreditation of psychotherapists (*Self & Society* May 1992) go without challenge. "If a therapist is not good then either he or she will not attract clients or the client will come to recognise that the relationship is not beneficial and terminate it." Sadly this simply isn't always true. People who have, for example, been abused as children can remain or return to abusive relationships. Sometimes they seek them out and try and 'cure' the abuser/therapist. The statement, unwittingly ends up straight out of Thatcherite free-market rhetoric.

The whole article is full of: "It is widely felt . . . many are now being told . . . practitioners (being in) despair . . . driven from it . . . outlawed . . . working under greater and greater restrictions . . ." It really is a bit over the top. At some time in the future it is likely that the term 'psychotherapist' will become a protected title, but you can always call yourself a personal growth consultant or anything else.

Accreditation doesn't guarantee people are good therapists. However, if I have toothache and

need a dentist in a hurry, then I am glad at that time that the title 'dentist' is a protected one and the person I have found isn't someone who has just set themselves up in the garden shed with their Black and Dekker!

Yours sincerely,
Martin Jelfs

Dear Martin,

Yes, I think it needs saying loud and clear to the opponents of registration that if the title 'psychotherapist' becomes a protected title, as it almost certainly will, it will continue to be easy for anyone to offer exactly what they are offering now. The common law restrictions which apply now will continue, namely the client must consent and the therapist must not claim to cure anything. The only further restriction will be that nobody may call themselves 'psychotherapist' unless they are registered — which they only can be if they have a recognised training and supervision. I am sorry we printed an article which seemed to doubt this.

Your bit about dentistry is a delicious red herring, or at any rate a bad analogy. My dentist anaesthetises my feelings, makes only the minimal necessary contact with my person, treats my teeth mechanically and independently of any other aspect of me and so on. If my psychotherapist did that I would report her to you!

Would you or other readers please write and tell me what professionals do offer useful analogies with psychotherapists? Doctors, lawyers, priests, fortune tellers, film directors, actors, thesis supervisors, tinkers? We could print some of the replies and I will send a small gift to the one I like best.

Yours, David

