

Dear *S&S*,

as long as I have been a member of the membership committee of AHPP (must be more than 5 years now) I have successfully argued against the introduction of the new category of supervisor and trainer. However, now a majority of AHPP members seem to have voted for it - which surely does not make it more right.

This issue is of particular importance since with an introduction of these new categories we will be giving in to a hierarchical structure (as you can only become supervisor or trainer after some years of being a psychotherapist, supervisor/trainer will equal 'senior psychotherapist') and the general paranoia in our profession.

People used to join AHPP because they wanted to belong, to share, to learn together. Now they, join because they fear not to belong.

It used to be fun and exciting to work in the membership committee, People applied for the category of psychotherapy because they felt personally challenged by filling out the application, seeing it as a rite of passage.

Today we are often joined by people who are desperate and fearful, people who think they need the UKCP certificate to survive. I now experience an increasingly charged atmosphere where complaints or appeals become part of our agenda in the membership committee meetings - two, or three years ago this was unheard of.

And it will get worse.

Some years ago to give the name of the supervisor was enough for the successful application. Today the supervisor has to fill in a separate questionnaire. We now are checking out the supervisors in detail, to make sure they are properly trained as well. I bet that within a year we will demand from the supervisors to prove that they are properly supervised for the supervision work they offer (its not a joke- this has been suggested). Give us another two years and we will check the supervisor's supervisor whether s/he is in supervision with a supervisor who is qualified to supervise supervisors who supervise supervisors for the supervision they offer ... - and I am sure we will then soon discuss the category of the 'supervisor's supervisor' (And of course we then can offer new training...)

All in the name of control and regulations and safety and professionalism.

We soon will be an organisation of well-trained, well-supervised, well-groomed and well adapted, absolutely sterile psychotherapists, obsessed with their power

base, desperately dependant on outer recognition and values - reflecting perfectly a paranoid society. Working with us will be absolutely safe, utterly boring and ineffective.

Some argue that I am a dreamer, that things have changed and had to since I first joined AHPP more than 17 years ago. But especially as a psychotherapist I cannot give up dreaming. And I should not need to. Some argue we lose our right to exist if we do not stand up for ourselves. I believe we are much more in danger of losing our right to exist by our very own action, by becoming over professionalised and, with that, mere servants of main stream society.

Regards,
Jochen Encke

RESPONSE FROM DAVID KALISCH ON THE STATUTORY REGISTRATION OF PSYCHOTHERAPISTS, Vol. 27 No.6

There is no clear body of evidence to support the view, or indeed that even suggests support for the view, that the statutory registration of psychotherapy would protect the interests of the public. Indeed in a recent debate in the literature, (Feltham), Digby Tantam, one of the country's leading proponents of statutory registration, doesn't even attempt to argue this case on these grounds. On the contrary, there is an extensive literature, backed up by years of outcome research that clearly points to there being a very strong case against statutory registration, see Mowbray, House, Totton, Bohart, Hogan etc. in this field, and which strongly indicates that the only group whose interests are likely to be enhanced by such legislation would be the psychotherapists thus registered. Naturally enough, this latter group has been loath to protest about the possibility of such an outcome!

Since the publication of Mowbray's seminal text, 'The Case Against Psychotherapy Registration' in 1995, there has been no serious attempt by the proponents of such registration to counter the evidence on which his work was based. Any impartial reading of the literature and research in this field can, and has come to one conclusion and one conclusion only, namely 'statutory registration should be assumed detrimental (to the interests of the public) unless proven to be both necessary and beneficial'. There is thus a clear ethical obligation upon the protagonists of professional registration to logically and empirically justify their position. Needless to say the current bill under consideration is accompanied by no such logical or empirical justification.

Additionally, if the legislature were looking for a simple way to give the public added protection from unethical psychotherapists, the only plausible basis for considering legislation in this field, it would be far simpler, and less expensive to improve the remedies available at the civil, and indeed at the criminal law, not just for this but for other caring professions. Needless to say, the proponents of

statutory registration never propose this because such legislation whilst clearly aimed at protecting the public, provides no fringe benefits at all to the professionals.

Proponents of statutory registration often argue from the example of other professions, namely, law and medicine. However, it is arguable that psychotherapy and counselling are not professions at all but more like vocations, see Totton, or on a more mundane level simply occupations where the risk to the client is relatively small compared to other unregistered occupations and trades; e.g. building, car mechanics, where the public has to make do, and does quite satisfactorily, with the remedies available through civil law. In other words the argument from the example of other professions is a circular and misleading one. Psychotherapy and counselling are attempting to become recognised as professions in the UK today, and one of the main mechanisms for so doing would be via statutory recognition. The argument for being treated like one of the professions cannot therefore stand on the assumption of already being one of the professions.

Once again the research evidence is clear: the kinds of skills and qualities necessary for the effective psychotherapist/counsellor are more like good parenting skills than they are like those of a surgeon or barrister. As Professor David Howe puts it, 'many of the elements of the effective therapist-client relationship appear similar to those of a good enough parent-child relationship. Counselling courses reflect this. They are mainly filled by women who have an experience of caring. Entry is not dependent on 'A' level passes, let alone possession of a degree, and courses are part-time and experience based. The recent fashion of linking psychotherapy courses to postgraduate degrees reflects the training institutes' desire for kudos and academic institutions' need for numbers and has little to do with the level of complexity of the skills and theory needed to be learnt by the effective practitioner. Psychotherapists, perhaps because their practice involves hours of self-abnegation and narcissistic denial seem to have an inexhaustible appetite for tokens of status outside their office hours. Needless to say, the momentum towards state recognition of a profession has been driven by those with the strongest of such needs coupled with the closet narcissists in the rest of the field.

Put simply, the drive towards registration is fuelled by the unquenchable self-importance of a few leading figures in the field, and invested in, principally by the main training institutes who are working, through statutory registration, to guarantee their monopoly control over training for years to come. The support of some of the therapy bureaucracies for this drive comes from this same snout in the trough mentality and is nothing more or less than the pursuit of self-interest by interest groups set up and joined for that very purpose. Again it may be argued that under the current arrangements anybody can set up a name plate and call themselves a psychotherapist. The reality is that very few do, and charlatans appear in all walks of life not just the therapy field. In reality, in this as in other trades, people vote with their feet. If you set up as a 'builder' and have few building skills, people soon take their business elsewhere, and so it is

in the therapy world. In this area of activity the market truly is the best regulator there is. In fact clients/patients are far more likely to be taken in and not trust their instincts by those few psychopathic personalities with books to their names and certificates galore on their wall who haunt every sphere of activity where trust and human relationships are involved. Needless to say, these types are always the first to accredit and look respectable.

Regarding the employed sector, employers are able to run a rule over their prospective counsellors ensuring, if they wish to, that they do have the relevant training and experience. It would be quite simple, if it were deemed necessary, to introduce a licensing system for counsellors and therapists at the local authority level which would enable members of the public to inspect the credentials of their proposed therapists. However, this offers no fringe benefits to the status hungry and no centralisation of training and therefore has no appeal to those who have pushed for registration.

In sum then, the case for psychotherapy and counselling registration is indeed a skimpy one based on a foundation that is far more about self-interest than the interests of the public. I pray, therefore, that anyone considering this legislation looks at the evidence, the research material, and the relevant articles and books on the subject. If the situation ever arose where the public did need extra measures of protection, the legislature should look for an economic way of so doing that does not involve privileging one set of practitioners at the expense of another. The fact that large numbers of practitioners have responded to the issues involved in this, in ways that can only be described as docile, compliant, passive and bored, tells us nothing about the issues themselves but everything about how psychotherapists like any other social grouping behave when vulnerable to promises of enhanced status at the same time as the threat of marginalisation and social exclusion. From this point of view the prospect of statutory registration has already done immeasurable harm to psychotherapy : creating schisms between psychotherapists, skewing the accrediting and training organisations towards activities that have little or nothing to do with competent training and practice, and encouraging defensive-mindedness in therapists, supervisors , trainers and trainees alike.

Further Reading

- Richard Mowbray, *The Case Against Psychotherapy Registration*. T.M.P., 1995
Mike Saks, *Professions and the Public Interest*, Routledge, 1995
Richard House & Nick Totton (eds), *Implausible Professions*, PCCS Books 1998
Roberta Russell, 'Report on Effective Psychotherapy - Legislative Testimony', Lake Placid, New York
Hilgarth Press, 1981 (with 1993 update)
Daniel B Hogan, *The Regulation of Psychotherapists*, 4 vols. Ballinger 1979
Feltham, Colin: *Controversies in Psychotherapy and Counselling*: Sage, 1999
Arthur Bohart and K. Tallman, 'The Active Client: Therapy as Self-Help', *American Journal of Humanistic Psychotherapy* Vol 36 no 3, 1996

Dear *S&S*,

Congratulations to Gaie Houston for her honesty and courage in daring to discuss the future of therapy in such a forthright and open-minded manner, Feb.-March issue. I suspect I'm not alone in being aware of a steadily increasing number of erstwhile therapy practitioners who are giving up working as therapists, I count myself among this group, or who are changing quite fundamentally the nature of their client work to something that far transcends 'therapy' as conventionally understood. There are probably a number of complex reasons for this: for one, I certainly relate to Gaie's asking whether therapy might actually be bad for therapists, or even, dare I venture, an extremely sophisticated defence against a full engagement with the rawness, unpredictability and challenge of relationship in the real world as opposed to the professionally bounded world of the consulting room. A central, and not unrelated, issue is surely the place of therapy within evolving human, predominantly Western culture. Paul Cushman and David Smail, among others, have interesting things to say about this, as does Lavinia Gomez in her article. I certainly view therapy as an historically specific, and ultimately transitory, cultural phenomenon; yet those who actually practise and make a living from it have an understandable tendency to treat therapy as an eternal, unproblematic given of society, and often uncritically support its institutional instalment as a fixed, statutorily legitimised feature of our cultural landscape, rather than as just one, comparatively fleeting moment in our rapid cultural and spiritual evolution.

Perhaps the drive institutionally to professionalise therapy, extensively reported and discussed by David James and Denis Postle in the same issue, is in large measure a fear-driven, largely unconscious and, of course, futile attempt to render fixed and secure this intrinsic fluidity and uncertainty. Yet if we accept that a central aspect of the work of therapy is that of helping clients in encountering, surviving and flourishing through anxiety, uncertainty and the inherent limitations of cognitive knowing, then it surely behoves us as practitioners to live in and through those existential realities in our own professional lives and practices, rather than erecting and cementing in place self-interested professionalising structures with their officially sanctioned regimes of truth, one highly pernicious and stultifying effect of which will be to make it far more difficult for us individually and collectively even to think of a non- or post-therapy elsewhere. I agree wholeheartedly with Gaie that what therapy has to offer 'has no business to be made the property of one profession'; and with John Rowan, same issue, that 'We have lost something of value if our fear leads us to developing so many rules and boundaries... that we are afraid to be different or take any risks'.

Finally, if we accept the view that individuals' own developmental path in some sense echoes and reflects the evolution of human consciousness more generally, then the noticeably increasing tendency for therapists to give up and move beyond therapy, a phrase which has, revealingly, appeared in several book titles in recent years, may well represent the first tell-tale signs of a coming post-therapy era; cf. my article in *S&S*, 25 (2), 1997, of the kind Gaie alludes to in her section entitled, 'Let's try and do ourselves out of a job'. And on this view, the kind of statutory professionalisation represented by the Alderdice Bill is at best an irrelevance, and at worst a positive impediment to the maturing evolution of human consciousness, whatever future direction it might take.

Best wishes,
Richard House