Reflections on our Process

Tree Staunton

Regulation, accountability and self destruction

Over the last few years 'Regulation' has become a loaded word in our world. Many of you reading this issue of *S&S* will have been engaged in debates about regulation. You may have been pulled this way and that, polarised into a pro or an anti camp, until you wondered who to believe and what to think. The most gripping aspect of the Regulation debate has been the strength of opinion, and often it has seemed that opinion was more an expression of strong feeling than of actual fact. During the hot debate over HPC and State regulation what affected me most was the *quality* of the debate. When I felt that I was hearing something balanced, considered and thoughtful, I was more inclined to feel I could engage and consider various perspectives. But too often I heard ranting, a shrill, irrational tone, accusatory and threatening, a reactivity; and this was frequently from the anti-regulation camp. The word 'hate' was often used. Who were 'the HPC' when we hated them? This kind of discourse did not speak to me, and I think it alienated many others.

So despite my natural bent towards the idea of self-regulation, in the end the process was more affecting than the content. I felt more concerned about the irrationality in the therapeutic community than I did about the measured statements of the proposed regulator.

But post Judicial Review and change of government we can all breathe a sigh of relief that we got the HPC out of our hair and now we can get on and regulate ourselves. Move over HPC and bring on CHRE. Yet this fierce battle between our profession and a potential regulator has obviously not been resolved. It sits around in the field. If we imagine that we have a 'clean slate' and we are starting from scratch, rethinking the way we as a profession should be accountable, then we are not thinking as therapists.

It may be partially buried, but the rawness of the conflict, the deep wounding that occurred, and the extreme polarisations within the field have yet to be dialogued with and properly understood. It is not put to rest and it will rise up again.

Are we ready for this, or will it simply overtake us again in another form, with another bloody battle of wills erupting, perhaps this time between UKCP and CHRE? For example, issues have already been raised about CHREs deeply problematic guidelines on '*Clear Sexual Boundaries between Healthcare Professionals and Patients'* which preclude self disclosure of one's sexual identity to clients. There are any number of run-ins imaginable here. Or if UKCP now takes on a stronger regulatory role under the CHRE umbrella as proposed, perhaps, as the old wounds resurface, UKCP will find itself in the 'HPC position' – this time it will carry the 'them' for 'us'. As the Central Complaints Process is established will we fight each other as to who, and how and in what way we are judged to be failing in our duty of care?

One thing is sure – we as therapists do not welcome 'outside eyes' on our work and I see this as having a direct impact on our research capacities and our promotion of ourselves. We

have to come under scrutiny when we present research findings, and this is an essential part of developing our profession. Whilst our passions seem to become fired by opposition and polemics, we remain relatively unforthcoming about our clinical achievements and struggles.

Is there something self destructive in this? Do we remain rebellious teenagers rather than engaging parental models, internalising and embracing positive authority?

Self regulation and peer feedback systems

I come from a background of grassroots activism. From early on my disillusionment with and lack of trust in authority compelled me to act and take charge. Not surprisingly then, in every area of work I have risen to a leadership position without intending to, simply because I was prepared to share a vision and work hard to achieve it. Growing into my own authority has meant that I needed to trust myself, and I know no better way to grow this trust than to be accountable to others. But is it enough that I am accountable to my peers? Becoming conscious of power dynamics is an essential part of any therapy, and a willingness to place the authority in another – albeit temporarily – seems to me essential to integration – to be in relationship with the power dynamics from both sides. This becomes more important the further up the ladder I go, and the more external power and authority I assume. If I set high standards for myself it is because I want to be the best I can, and if I fail I want to be held accountable.

What should the system look like?

I would not want to place a regulatory system in a 'power over' position. I would want a system that has flexibility and dialogue with the profession it regulates, mirroring the kind of qualities of relating that we aspire to in therapy. The need for self–object mirroring is intrinsic to our values. For example, it is why we in the humanistic and integrative approaches place such a strong emphasis on the need for supervision throughout our careers. Systems of accountability such as feedback and evaluation operate throughout our trainings. We are accountable to our students and employers. If we are not open to that 'self-regulating other' the process is no longer healthy.

We need a system that can develop and evolve but where there are consequences if we stop looking to others for help. We fear that a regulatory system will be rigid, that it won't understand us or be nuanced enough, that it will suppress innovation, experimentation and creativity. We also fear that it will be too harsh for the wrong reasons and that the kind of scapegoating we see in Social Work will happen to us, where the hordes are pointing a finger and wanting someone to blame, while others fear attack and become bystanders. These primitive fears and projections tend to happen when the system is too authoritarian and not able to take into account human error. It seems to me that the further away from the centre

29

of power we stand, and the less access we have to the human face within the system, the more likely we are to project these primitive fears.

How do we get there?

In true Humanistic form I would say process before content. Always process first. We need to address the collective psychosis that was set off by the notion of an outside authority regulating us. Unless we are able to go back into the darker and more painful wounds that were opened we will not be able to reinvent a new and better system, whoever heads it up.

The very best of Humanistic practice is always process led. So in the darkest days of the Alliance versus HPC I imagined group process where we would dialogue using role plays and switching, allowing alter egos to speak and so on. PCSR (Psychotherapists and Counsellors for Social Responsibility) attempted such a dialogue. Tremendous strength and commitment is needed to work with this process. As Humanistic practitioners we have many techniques in our repertoire for standing outside of our personal viewpoints, inhabiting opposite ones and learning about our projections. Coming face to face with the otherwise faceless bureaucracy might allow us to come to terms with our own desire for order or authority. In process terms, the swing in both directions needs to happen before the middle ground can be found.

In our Humanistic and Integrative College of UKCP, the best demonstration of democracy can be seen when the meeting allows all voices to be heard and the group can withstand the tensions and allow disagreements to surface. Yet if a single voice dominates and distorts, and a 'complex' takes over, the whole group can become paralysed and unable to find consensus. At these times it is important that we reconfirm our shared goal. Just as we need a therapeutic alliance with our clients, and an aim for the therapy, so we as a profession need to agree where we are going in terms of regulation. Do we want to be accountable and do we see the need for regulation? When we know where we want to go, it makes getting there much easier.

We often referred to ourselves as a multi headed monster during the bad old days of struggle for and against HPC. We are not one profession, but a number of different modalities. In UKCP we have held together for nearly 20 years with enough commonality and shared interest to agree on generic standards and governance. Sometimes the in-fighting has been tough and there have been casualties, and some have gone their separate ways. It will be important in the times ahead to tie our colours to the mast, and stop insisting that we go forward together and in the same direction. Let's allow the splits, if they be there. Separation is not always acrimonious – though often it can be – but it also releases creativity and new energy. So as we set out on the next part of the journey, let's agree where we are heading. To regulate or not to regulate…. we all have the freedom to choose. But if we do subscribe to a system of regulation there will be losses and compromises. That's life.

Tree Staunton is an Integrative Body Psychotherapist. She is outgoing Chair of the Humanistic & Integrative College of UKCP and Director of Studies at Bath Centre for Psychotherapy & Counselling.

30