

Some Recent Developments In Relation To Regulation By The State

In May 2008 it was made clear that the Government intended to proceed apace with the regulation of the psychotherapies, including psychoanalysis. The regulator would be the Health Professions Council, despite the almost unanimous agreement among professional groups that HPC was not suited to regulate psychotherapy. A great deal of correspondence was sent which set out reasons for the unsuitability of HPC, yet this was not responded to in any substantial way. Before regulation can occur, a number of steps have to be worked through:

Firstly, the definition of what psychotherapy/psychoanalysis is.

In order to establish this, Skills for Health, a Public Authority, on the instructions of the Department of Health, was given the project of consultation. They were supposedly going to set up working groups with representation from various modalities which would arrive at generally acceptable National Occupational Standards for the psychodynamic psychotherapies and psychoanalysis. The Psychoanalytic Consortium and The College of Psychoanalysts-UK both tried to be part of this process. The Consortium was not given the courtesy of a reply; the process simply began without them. The College was promised two places but was subsequently excluded without any explanation. Thus, those who were from the outset voicing their discontent with the nature of the process were excluded from contributing anything to that process, including being able to explain to those participating in it in good faith, that it was from the outset a biased process. It was clear at this point that careful vetting of the political stance of members was more important than a fair distribution of places.

Secondly, the production of National Occupational Standards.

The working group for psychodynamic psychotherapies and

psychoanalysis has now met a couple of times and produced a set of National Occupational Standards, drafted first of all by two academics who are known for their work which adopts methodology similar to that used in an attempt to validate CBT. Despite the clear antithesis between the psychoanalytic and the cognitive approach, the acknowledged framework for the production of the analytic standards is that of CBT. If these are accepted, they will probably become part of a manual to which we may all be expected to adhere, despite being excluded from the process. The NOS produced are based upon a very particular view of what constitutes psychodynamic work and psychoanalysis. This is a view that many feel does not bear more than a passing resemblance to the way they have been trained and experienced in working. Thus, at a stroke, different orientations, the training analysis, current trainings, are at risk of being turned into something outside the remit of what will be defined by this brutal process.

Thirdly, wider consultation within the psychotherapy/psychoanalysis organisations for comments on the NOS.

This is the stage at which we now find ourselves. There seems to be a choice of approach: comply with the demand of the organisation which has up to now refused to allow us to participate, and produce the usual rational and well-thought-out arguments as to why this should not be imposed on those segments of the profession who do not recognise their ethics or way of working in this NOS document; or, refuse at this point to participate as we have been offered no part in producing the NOS and will therefore be unlikely to be listened to at this point.

It seems clear that the objectives of this political process were set at the beginning of the project - of course, this is how political process usually works - and clearer still that objections will not be listened to. Recent correspondence between the Consortium and the Department of Health has highlighted this barrier to a proper dialogue and also shown some of the confusion surrounding the whole project. The DoH seemed unaware of the problems with the SfH consultation, and they encouraged the Consortium to contact the BACP to discuss any issues the Consortium might have, describing BACP as a professional organisation that "currently helps the psychotherapy and counselling profession to self-regulate". BACP of course has no such role and has never claimed to. The DoH advice is so wide of the mark that one wonders where they could possibly have got this idea from. The Consortium's response to the DoH letter and related correspondence will be posted on the website in the near future.