

# Professional Practice Issues for Applied Practitioner Health Psychologists

## 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Applied Health Psychology Networking & Careers Events 2014-2015

Hallas, C.N., Cain, S. & Ledermann, D. (2016). *Health Psychology Update*, 25, (6).

Since 2014 the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Applied Health Psychology Networking and Careers Events were held at the BPS London Offices with the aim of enabling Health Psychology colleagues who are working in applied settings (e.g. public health, the Public Health England, NHS, local councils and private consulting/ clinical services) to come together to discuss applied health psychology (AHP) professional practice issues and challenges, to develop peer support systems and gain valuable networking opportunities across geographical and specialist interest areas.

The events were born out of the challenges of AHP practice that two Consultant Health Psychologists had experienced over 15 years of working in the NHS, Public Health, Private healthcare and Local Authorities (Claire Hallas & Sasha Cain – now working as scchconsulting.com). The number of Health Psychologists working in applied practice has significantly increased over the years and the identity of AHPs is more defined. However, there remain significant challenges due to the size of this professional group, as most AHPs and trainees who work in applied settings are isolated from Health Psychologists, finding themselves being managed and/or supervised by other Applied Psychologists or non-psychology professionals. Sometimes they are not employed in a role that is primarily identified as Health Psychology (i.e. as a public health commissioner). In some employment situations our AHP colleagues are isolated from their professional identity and evidence base, have their specific health psychology CPD and registration needs unmet and their pay grade and skills undervalued – which could lead to ineffective practice, or at worse to unsafe or potentially illegal practice. Therefore the objectives of setting up an annual network event for UK Applied Health Psychologists and Trainees was multifunctional, but with a core purpose of improving the connectedness of AHPs, addressing safe practice, CPD and networking opportunities.

The 1<sup>st</sup> event was on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2014 and attended by 46 professionals (who were a mix of qualified, trainees and those working in AHP practice with Stage 1 qualifications). The theme was “*Identifying AHP Competencies for Different Roles and Settings*”. A significant part of the day comprised of two interactive group workshops debating clinical, managerial, strategic and research skills needed to practice in different applied contexts (e.g. multi-disciplinary teams, service development/commissioning and clinical care). A significant part of the day was given to formal networking within geographical regions and specialist interest topics. Attendees reviewed the day positively and overwhelmingly agreed to the need for future AHP events.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> event was therefore held on November 16<sup>th</sup> 2015 and attended by 34 professionals. Its theme was “*The Role of Professional Health Psychology Supervision in Facilitating Safe, Legal and Effective Practice*”. This first section of the day focused on the interactive experience of receiving professional supervision from AHPs (SCCH facilitated). Qualified and unqualified HPs were separated to work on 2 AHP challenges which were submitted prior to the event by 2 qualified AHPs. The group supervision experience focused on different areas of practice; 1) clinical care for a bariatric surgery patient and 2) a service development challenge for a private practice AHP. Both workshops were given substantial time to explore the value of the process and methods of professional supervision and its impact on AHP practice.

The second section of the day aimed to spotlight HCPC fitness to practice processes for Practitioner Psychologists’. The invited speaker, Consultant Health Psychologist and HCPC Fitness to Practice (FTP) Panel Member Pavlo Kanellakis, gave valuable insights into the imperative role of professional supervision as part of CPD, reflective safe practice and in clinical decision making which was critical evidence submitted to FTP panels. Further discussions identified the importance of within-specialism Supervision to evidence that their practice meets HCPC Standards of Proficiency for *Health Psychology*. Applied research was clarified as being within HCPC Standards of Proficiency and therefore within the remit of a FTP case. Types of complaints discussed included taking on roles that Psychologists’ were untrained for, or not receiving supervision for, and where they have given information to the public that had misled their level of competency. Overall it was a really enlightening and thought provoking discussion about protecting ourselves in AHP practice.

Suggestions for future events included AHPs wanting to present practice related work (e.g. service developments, case studies, clinical audits). Therefore, the 3<sup>rd</sup> event may now be adapted into an AHP practice mini conference - watch this space! See [www.scchconsulting.com](http://www.scchconsulting.com) for more info on the 2015 event and feedback reviews.

***If you want to join go to: LinkedIn UK Applied Practitioner Health Psychology Group!***

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