

Professional Practice Issues for Applied Practitioner Health Psychologists

1st & 2nd Annual Applied Health Psychology Networking & Careers Events 2014-2015

In 2014 and 2015 the 1st and 2nd Applied Health Psychology Networking and Careers Events were held at the BPS London Offices with the aim of enabling Health Psychology colleagues working in applied settings such as public health, private clinical practice, The Department of Health, NHS, local councils and private consulting 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). During this time, the number of Health Psychologists working in applied practice has significantly increased and the identity of Health Psychology as an applied profession become more defined. However in reality, there remain significant challenges to AHP and most qualified Health Psychologists and trainees that work in applied settings are employed in isolated posts usually not working with other Health Psychologists, finding themselves being managed and/or supervised by other Applied Psychologists or non-psychology professionals and sometimes not having a primarily Health Psychology based role (i.e. as a public health commissioner). In some scenarios this could mean that Health Psychologists 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 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 addressing safe practice, AHP CPD and networking opportunities.

The 1st event was on 19th October 2014 and attended by 46 professionals (mix of qualified, trainees and those working in AHP practice with an MSc in HP). The theme was *“Identifying AHP Competences 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 competently practice in different applied contexts such as multi-disciplinary teams, service development/commissioning and clinical care. Dedicated time was also given to formal networking which was divided into geographical regions and specialist interest topics.

The 2nd event on November 16th 2015 was attended by 34 professionals. Its theme was *“The Role of Professional Health Psychology Supervision in Facilitating Safe, Legal and Effective Practice”*. Two workshops focused on the interactive experience of receiving professional supervision with an applied practitioner HP (SCCH facilitated). Qualified and unqualified HPs were separated to work on 2 AHP challenges which were submitted prior to the event by 2 qualified HPs. The group supervision experience focused on different areas of practice; 1) clinical care for a bariatric surgery case study and 2) a strategic service development challenge for a private practice HP. Both workshops were given substantial time to really explore the value of the process and methods of professional supervision and its impact on AHP practice.

The event also gave time to understanding how the HCPC review Practitioner Psychologists’ fitness to practice following a complaint. The invited speaker, Consultant Psychologist Pavlo Kanellakis gave valuable insights into the process and the imperative role of professional supervision as part of CPD, reflective safe practice and in clinical decision making which was critical evidence submitted to complaints reviews. Further discussions explored that if a Psychologist was being managed and supervised by the same professional (and not a HP) then the review often concluded that safe and fit practice was not being maintained. Types of complaints were around 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 a really enlightening and thought provoking discussion about real challenges for AHP practice.

Feedback after the events was excellent, with suggestions for the future highlighted that AHPs want to be able to present practice related work (e.g. service developments, case studies, clinical audits). The 3rd annual event may now possibly be adapted into an AHP practice mini conference watch this space! See scchconsulting.com/networkingevent for more info and feedback reviews.

If you want to know more: [Linkedin UK Applied Practitioner Health Psychology Group](#) – Join now!

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