

The relationship between counselling and Improving Access to Psychological Therapies

Counselling is important in the spectrum of talking therapies, aiming to help people explore their feelings and make dynamic change in their lives and relationships.

This short-term supportive approach helps a lot of people deal with psychological distress caused by:

- difficulty in adjusting to life events, illnesses, disabilities or losses
- relationship issues
- issues from earlier in life
- needing to feel in control
- a reluctance to embrace changes in their circumstances.

Counselling has more than 7,700 accredited practitioners around the country – more than any other talking therapy. Around half of all GP surgeries have counsellors attached to them.

Many counsellors work in the NHS and others are employed by charities or in private practice. The Government's Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) programme recognises their value in supporting people's emotional resilience and sense of well being.

The IAPT programme is training a new workforce in cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), approved by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) as the main treatment for depression and anxiety disorders. NICE also recommends several non-CBT treatments, including counselling, for depression (but not anxiety disorders). A Statement of Intent, published by the Secretary of State, commits to providing patients with a choice of NICE indicated treatments as the new psychological therapy services mature.

The IAPT programme recognizes two essential roles for counselling and counsellors:

First, as a NICE-recommended treatment for mild to moderate depression, it may be offered alongside CBT at Step Three in the stepped care system for helping people suffering from depression.

Second, many people experiencing psychological distress in the context of life difficulties, are not primarily suffering from depression and/or an anxiety disorder, but are likely to benefit from a counselling approach. This is outside the IAPT programme but forms an important part of NHS provision for mental health.

The IAPT programme welcomes a wide range of mental health professionals onto its CBT-focused training courses. By virtue of their considerable therapy experience, many counsellors are well positioned to extend their skills by training in CBT. However, the IAPT programme envisages a long-term need for counselling services and has, therefore, not issued any guidance encouraging a de-commissioning of counselling services or recommending that counsellors should retrain.

PCT commissioners are responsible for assessing local need and deciding the types and amounts of various NHS psychological therapy services required in their area.

Accredited counsellors in any particular area of the country are listed on the following websites

- British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy www.bacp.co.uk
- Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists in Primary Care www.cpc-online.co.uk
- United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy www.psychotherapy.org.uk