



accredited register

Returning to face-to-face practice – an ethical decision

On Monday, 4 July the next steps of the release of lockdown in England will take place and as we know there are slightly different timetables and rules for people living in Wales and Scotland.

We received a letter from the Professional Standards Authority on 25 June, saying that the PSA,

“assures you that we continue to highlight the challenges faced and to seek further clarity on the interpretation of its guidance for AR practitioners with government. With personal care services due to open from 4 July 2020, we understand that your registrants will be considering what this means for their own practices. Although we are unable to interpret the guidance ourselves on behalf of registers, I would urge you to consider in full the Government’s guidance for workplaces and on infection prevention and control, as well as Public Health England (PHE) guidance on social distancing when advising your registrants”.

[PHE guidance is found here – but relate more to people working in a healthcare setting, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-infection-prevention-and-control>]

The guidance from the government remains that we must continue to work from home if possible. For social distancing 2 metres is set as the recommended distance, however this can be reduced to 1 metre if mitigating actions are taken (see for example <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/close-contact-services>)

Times of crisis have proved to be times of opportunity for those who have embraced online and telephone working. However, we appreciate how difficult this time has nevertheless been for many of our members. We know that some of you are keen to resume face-to-face work especially for,

- Clients for whom telephone or online therapy is not possible due to their home or family circumstances or is not a therapeutic option, and,
- Counsellors who are struggling financially because too few clients have been willing to transfer to online/telephone counselling.

Accepting that the government guidance does not explicitly refer to counselling and psychotherapy and that the guidance on gov.uk is not always consistent or clear, we nonetheless need to recognise that in person counselling, carries heightened risks of

virus transmission because it takes place indoors, usually for 60 minutes or longer and involves many clients visiting the same premises. However, we also need to acknowledge as a profession, that if a way can be made for indoor venues to open safely, that similarly involves multiples of people, situated in one place for more than an hour (for example churches and cinemas), it would seem at least possible to consider re-opening in person, therapy services on a limited basis with safety measures in place.

Our advice is that if you can work remotely please continue to do so – it is the safest option with regard to transmission of the virus. However, counselling members in England who wish to resume face-to-face work with a limited number of clients, can plan to resume from 4 July, provided that they,

- have read and followed all the relevant government guidelines and commit to acting on, ongoing changes to these guidelines during the COVID-19 emergency for counselling agencies, other employers and people in private practice please consider especially, <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-business-reopening>,
- can evidence undertaking a full risk assessment of their practice setting and have put in place mitigating actions to reduce the risk of virus transmission, *A template example of risk management in the workplace is provided by the Health and Safety Executive, and can be adapted for counselling centres and private practice* <https://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/casestudies/pdf/office.pdf>,
- have worked through ACC's counselling checklist and implemented the necessary changes to their contracts and practice set up, see email of 5 June: https://www.acc-uk.org/public/docs/page-pdfs/Bulk_email_5_Jun_2020.pdf,
- have the support of their supervisor on a client by client basis (i.e. an ethical decision-making process to be undertaken for each client weighing up risks and benefits of in person therapy),
- have permission from their insurance company to return to face-to-face practice.

No member should feel under pressure to resume face-to-face work. The government have produced a decision tool to help people which can be accessed here: [Check if you should go back into work](#)

ACC have tried to be and want to continue to be as supportive as we can to all of our members at this time and so we have set-up two online events.

Date for your diary – Training in Online and Telephone Counselling – Friday, 24 July, 9.30 am till 4.30 pm (6 hours of CPD)

This training is suitable both for beginners and for those who have been working on-line training for a while. The training is led by Richard Lahey-James who is an experienced trainer and a registered and accredited ACC counsellor; supervisor and UKCP psychotherapist.

To facilitate the provision, by Christians, of quality pastoral care and counselling

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