

Clinical Supervision and Reflective Practice for Colleges

BACKGROUND

We are aware that there are growing numbers of staff in colleges for whom welfare is a significant role component. Although such staff have administrative and/or coordination roles, rather than clinical roles, discharging these often entail interacting with students who are in emotional distress, who may be at risk, and/or whose behaviour may be challenging to contain and respond to in a helpful way.

Other professional groups working closely with individuals in distress—including, but not limited to, mental health professionals, social workers, and nurses—receive regular clinical supervision to help them deal with the challenges of this kind of work. Such supervision is regarded as essential to safe practice. Counsellors, psychotherapists and clinical psychologists are all required to have regular clinical supervision as a condition of their accreditation to practice.

‘Clinical supervision’ has clear relevance to college staff, who perform challenging front-line roles and can find these stressful and challenging. Some colleges have made arrangements with private psychotherapists/psychologists to provide such supervision (many of these are former counsellors from our service). A growing number of colleges have approached the counselling service asking whether this is something we can provide. Until now, we have responded to these requests individually and on an ad hoc basis, but with growing numbers of college staff in welfare roles, the time feels right to formalise this offering and to make it readily accessible to all colleges.

UNDERSTANDING WHAT ‘CLINICAL SUPERVISION’ IS

Clinical supervision consists of regularly scheduled meetings between one or more staff members and a supervisor. (Frequency can be negotiated, but regularity and consistency is important.)

Clinical supervision typically includes the following activities:

- Discussion of overall caseload/workload and approaches to managing this
- Detailed discussion of particular challenging active cases—especially those which are disproportionately time-consuming, distressing or complicated
- Debriefing following a difficult experience, or a difficult interaction with a student
- Reflection on how the work is impacting the staff member personally and emotionally
- Thinking about approaches to self-care and maintaining personal resilience and well-being
- If group supervision: sharing of best practice, opportunity to create valuable peer-to-peer connections, contributing to each other’s learning

Even the most experienced staff benefit from regular supervision—someone who will listen attentively, understand the difficulty and throw light on the case from a different perspective. (It is worth noting that ALL mental health professionals, regardless of seniority or experience, are required to have this supervision.)

It is important to emphasise what clinical supervision is NOT: it is not a hierarchical relationship in which the ‘supervisor’ directs the staff member what to do. The supervisor is never directive or prescriptive, but simply offers a reflective space and an independent perspective.

It does not involve critical appraisal, evaluation or judgment. It is an opportunity to reflect on and process challenging experiences which form part of day-to-day professional life, in a safe and supportive environment.

This is not recommended for junior members of welfare teams e.g. JCR/MCR welfare reps, although we recommend that they are offered a meeting with someone in the college (e.g. Chaplain) every term to talk through issues.

Fortnightly Junior Dean Supervision is already available for colleges who train their junior deans via the Counselling Service.

THE FOUR MODELS CURRENTLY OFFERED

A. INDIVIDUAL OR PAIR CLINICAL SUPERVISION

For: One or two individuals for whom welfare is a substantial role component. (If two individuals, from the same college.)

Frequency: Two or three times termly; can be academic year only, or year-round

Length: 1 hour

B. GROUP CLINICAL SUPERVISION (members from different colleges)

For: Two or three individuals from different colleges. All should have roles with a substantial role component. Individuals will ideally occupy similar positions within their respective college structures, e.g. welfare coordinator, welfare administrator, welfare officer, etc.

Frequency: Two or three times termly; can be academic year only, or year-round

Length: 1.5 hours

C. REFLECTIVE PRACTICE MEETINGS WELFARE TEAM (all from same college)

For: All or subset of staff comprising a college welfare team

Frequency: Once or twice/term

Length: 1.5 hours

D. SIGNIFICANT EVENT REVIEW

For: Members of staff who have been drawn into dealing with important welfare cases during previous year

Length: 2 hours

Frequency: Once/year OR scheduled in response to a specific significant event which would be valuable to review retrospectively

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Further details are available from Karen Kendall or Sophie Lopez-Welsch,
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