Technology in Counselling: A Professional's Perspective

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An increasing number of our members appear to be embracing technology (such as video chat services, telephone, SMS and email) within their work with clients. We recently surveyed 174 members and the results revealed that 46% of respondents offer counselling sessions through some form of communication technology, while 57% of those who do not currently offer such services would consider doing so in the future.

The wide spread use of technology by counsellors highlights the versatility of the profession and demonstrates that counselling is something that doesn't have to involve the client lying on a couch.

We spoke to BACP member and qualified online counsellor, Myira Khan, who has been using technology in counselling for nearly a year. She explained why she chose to introduce technology into her practice:

"I was getting a lot of enquiries from clients who were unable to access a counsellor locally to them, due to either practical reasons or their preference for a Muslim or Asian counsellor, and for a time some clients were travelling a significant distance to access my face-to-face services.

"I recognised that I was able to help break down these barriers for clients to access counselling if I was able to offer my counselling services online."

Myira, who uses a video chat service, telephone and email to communicate with clients, believes there are many benefits to such methods. She added:

"I believe there are a lot of benefits to online counselling – for the client it could simply be the removal of practical barriers of physically getting to a counsellor.

"Online counselling eliminates any travel times or costs, or if there are any issues of accessibility or disability which prevents a client being able to access face-to-face counselling."

For Myira one of its biggest factors is that it also offers clients more choice. She explained:

"It can also open up the client's choices of which counsellor to see.

"Online counselling can provide additional choice to clients who are looking for a counsellor from a particular ethnic, cultural or religious background, a particular gender or any other preference they may have, such as a counsellor who is a specialist or experienced in working with a particular concern or issue where this choice is not available to the client locally."

As is also suggested by our survey results, Myira believes that the use of technology is growing quickly within the profession:

"I do believe that online counselling is growing very quickly in popularity, not only for counsellors choosing to work with this method but also from clients who can see the benefits of having counselling online and 'meeting' with their counsellor at a time and day that suits them."

The use of technology in counselling can offer wider accessibility and choice for both client and therapist, but there are important factors – such as confidentially and data protection issues - professionals should take into consideration before embarking in online counselling that go further than simply switching on a laptop or picking up a telephone.

"As online counselling grows in popularity I believe it is crucial for counsellors to undertake specific online counselling training before working with clients online," added Myira.

"Online counselling is not just a matter of taking our face-to-face counselling training and using it online.

"There are additional skills behind working effectively and ethically online, not only taking on board the specific issues of being online [such as confidentiality, data protection and security issues] but how we work with the clients, to build trust with the client, establish the therapeutic relationship and to enable clients to work safely through their concerns and difficulties."

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