Index of themes covered in - Coronavirus: Considering our Responses and Responsibilities

Week 1

Secure and Effective **platforms**: What is available? Exploring the use of Zoom, in particular.

Insurance - checking in with your insurance company, to ensure you are covered online

Considering your **environment** when engaging online - exploring ways of approaching this

Making individual, **informed choices** around how best to continue engaging with individual clients (online platforms, telephone, taking a break, offering 'holding support' as valid use of the space and time)

Preparing your clients to engage online - providing helpful information before starting: eg issues of confidentiality, back-up plans in the case of technological failure, payment of fees.

Additional **contracting**: how to gain your clients' agreement and commitment to new processes (without abandoning your existing framework).

Safe and ethical practice online

Where to find u**seful documents** relating to **competencies**, additional **ethical guidelines** etc.

Advice and guidance from a range of **professional bodies**

Introduction to recognising and working with the **'Online disinhibition effect'**

Supervision needs when working online

Week 2

Re-evaluating ourselves and our clients

Helping clients to find a **confidential space** in a noisy/crowded household, or an alternative source of support if that is impossible and/or unsafe

Self-care: what **workload** can I manage when working online (and is this different from face-to-face)? What **toll** does this approach take on us, physically and psychologically?

Continuing to hold clients, contain and set **boundaries** (even if the boundaries need to be different from usual)

Setting **fees** - what do I need to consider?

Ongoing work with **existing clients vs** taking on **new clients** (whom you have never met) - additional thinking around **assessment**

Beginning to think about **risk** in online environments and during period of social isolation, safety plans. Risks to confidentiality and addressing these.

Web-cam interaction vs text-based interaction. Working without visual or auditory cues. (Need for additional training?)

Online counselling **training organisations** - finding the right one for you

Students on placement - exploring creative possibilities with your training organisation to continue gaining counselling hours

Telephone therapy

Social media, immediacy and anxiety. Transference and countertransference in social media. **Netiquette** (online etiquette guidelines)

Poem: Breath of Life by Dana Faulds

Week 3

Considerable information regarding **using Zoom** - exploring the ongoing concerns around **security and privacy** with Zoom. Offering some informed responses to some of the queries being raised. Looking at the action Zoom is taking to respond. Encouraging **reflection** and emphasising **personal agency** in using platforms. Using the available settings **responsibly**

Being reflective and thoughtful vs being reactive - working together to support each other

Providing **additional contracting and information for clients**: looking at a **sample document** theme-by-theme

How to gain **consent** from your client

Beginning to think about **assessment** and **taking on new clients** - what issues will you need to consider, what are your **training needs** and how can you address them?

Ending piece: "Welcome to Holland" by Emily Perl Kingsley

Week 4

Emotional regulation systems and how this situation is impacting on each of us as practitioners

Updating the situation re **Zoom**. How have Zoom continued to respond to criticism? Engaging with new platform settings etc.

How do we respond to **media** reports?

Risk management in online settings - further information (managing the impact on each of us as well as taking practical steps). What **additional information** do we need from clients **when contracting**? What can we do if we suddenly identify risk in an ongoing situation? Accepting and discussing **limitations** with clients. Managing unexpected loss of contact

Exploring the **evolving** picture with **client needs** - **resources and training** becoming available to help prepare therapists to carry out assessments. Particular challenges relating to managing **bereavement** and **trauma**.

Using some 'quiet time' now to prepare ourselves for the inevitable demands that will lie ahead. Using community for **support and self-care. Anxiety** within the profession and **projection** within professional spaces. Assessing our own 'fitness to practice'.

NHS support sessions and **volunteering**.

Poem: If You Would Grow - Shine the Light of Loving Self-Care on Yourself by Daniel F Mead

Week 5

The importance of feeling **'grounded'**

Revisiting weeks 1 - 4: the **'index'** that is now available to help you navigate these sessions.

Reflecting on the **volume of work** (or otherwise that people are experiencing). The variety of EAP responses to the crisis and what may be driving these (including '**fee structures**'). **Clients returning** to therapy (after taking an initial break whilst things moved online). Letting former clients know we are still working?

Self-care and **taking breaks** - weekends and holidays

Working with **trauma** (especially with those on **the front line**). 'Wobble rooms'. The triggering of traumatic memory responses when in isolation..**Therapeutic writing** and journaling with traumatised clients   Also work with **body movement**

The use of **questionnaires** and **measures** when working online

Thinking about **experiential training** to complement self-directed learning programmes

Data protection and the ICO

Revisiting **how to use Zoom safely** - finding the relevant resources

Taking on **new clients**, **contracting, assessment** etc - how to prepare yourself for this

Poem: Forget about Enlightenment   by John Welwood

Week 6

Acknowledging the hard work that has been put in by practitioners and in many services that has enabled client work to be transferred online safely and ethically. **Thinking systemically** about all the complexities involved in 'keeping things going'

Fatigue beginning to set in - recharging our batteries, achieving **a sustainable level of practice**

How to send out and ask clients to return **consent forms** securely - eg using '**snail mail**' - is it ok? (How do we make these judgements?) Verbal **agreements**; agreements shared in emails

How safe is **WhatsApp**?

Setting up, facilitating and contracting **online group work in sensitive settings**

Tech - managing/minimizing **screen freezes and other glitches**. Exploring the possible impact of our psychological processes on the performance of the tech

How to optimise **eye contact** in order to facilitate relational connections

Poem: It Couldn't be Done by Edgar Albert Guest

Week 7

What is happening to our **energy** and **motivation** at this point? Working with low energy levels. **Zoom fatigue** and its relationship with general fatigue (physical and psychological) : practical suggestions and considering the bigger picture.

Evaluating our own c**apacity for practice** at the present time and acknowledging our individual sense of **loss**. Knowing ourselves and **working to our strengths**

Self-care: gathering ideas from the group. Taking responsibility for our own wellbeing in order to meet our ethical responsibilities. Putting together our own collection of '**brief self-care ideas**'.

Ending Zoom sessions well for both counsellor and client.

Managing **disrupted connections**

Virus protection for computers and other devices.

Poem: She Let Go by Safire Rose

Week 8

Thinking about ourselves as **'hidden key workers'**.

How do we think about any possible relaxation of the lockdown measures and what do they mean for us as therapists? The **ethical and practical dilemmas** raised by beginning to come out of lockdown. '**Internal' ethics vs external expectations** and requirements. Different **interpretations** leading to some conflict?

Safety vs economic necessity?

The 'quietness' of lockdown - is this welcomed by some?

Human **connection** online - is the nature of relationships changing? Can online relationships facilitate different qualities of relationship and will this affect face-to-face relationships in the future?

What does it mean for the therapeutic relationship if we meet the client in their own home?

Revisiting the **security issues** relating to different **platforms**.

Keeping in contact with clients who have paused their counselling.

Story: Too Soon to Tell (Anon)

Week 9

Coming to terms with the **long-term changes** to our lives, both personal and professional. How to **adapt** and **change**? Our own experiences of **bereavement, loss and grief**, as well as that of our clients.

How to navigate **confusing advice** about what is safe (in terms of social distancing) and what isn't. The difficulties in translating this into our very individual practices. **Short-term planning** and adaptation **vs long-term changes** to our practice.

Professional ethics/personal ethics ("first do no harm")

Charging **fees** for sessions where there may be a **technological difficulty**, especially if this leads to a need for rescheduling. (Including **quick tips** for getting round some of the connection problems).

The use of **head-sets** - what to use and why?

Assessing new clients for online therapy - what kind of **training** do therapists need in order to feel sufficiently equipped for this? (Further information about training that is currently available). **Competencies** that are considered necessary for working online at all stages.

Not Smart Enough for a Smart Phone by Nandita Shailesh Shanbhag

Week 10

Context: beginning to move towards having to take more decisions and choices. Being bombarded with information, 'advice' and strong opinion. Feeling we may be making mistakes.

Reflecting on our **energy levels** internally and also the energy levels within society. What is the impact of shared anxiety; what kind of energy is generated by anxiety? And how do we attend to this within ourselves and the impact it has on clients?

Signposting: our need for leadership, but an acceptance that 'nobody has the right answers'.

Remembering to listen to **the client's voice** as well as all the other 'loud voices'. What has happened to the clients who asked to be put 'on hold'? (Do we go back to them?)

Going back to face-to-face work? What are the implications within the space, beyond the space? How can a workplace be made 'safe'? (Is it possible?).

What about carriers of the virus, with no symptoms (clients and therapists). Implications of **track and trace**? How will this work and what are the **implications for confidentiality** etc.? Revisiting the terms of your contract and perhaps adding a further clause relating to this.

Weighing up one **risk** against another. Life is full of risks; we have to **make informed choices.**

Working with clients overseas - how to check out whether or not its ok. (Checking with **insurance companies**).

Beginning to take on new clients: how to incorporate the medium of meeting itself into the assessment. Different **goals**?

May some therapists have found a new space they like when working online - might you want to continue offering online sessions even when you don't 'have' to? The changing face of **training**, now and in the future.

Poem: "Lockdown" by Devon Simkin-Samways aged 8

Week 11

Context: Things opening up. Feeling **confusion** over seemingly conflicting information around 'the way out'. What is OK/not OK for talking therapists?

How to make good, informed decisions? Do we need to make different decisions for individual clients? Whose '**expectations**' do we need to meet - and how do we prioritise our decision-making?

Clients: **revisiting their decisions** according to where we all are now, especially if they put things 'on hold' initially (expecting this only to be for a short while). **Referring on**, where necessary and appropriate, or directing to other resources.

Innovation and flexibility: trying out new initiatives eg ecotherapy. What questions do we need to ask ourselves before taking on a new initiative? (EG ethical decision-making, checking insurance cover, are we fulfilling data-protection requirements etc).

Addressing global political events - how we manage our internal responses and monitor the impact they may be having on our work. How do we experience and express **social responsibility**? How to respond to clients when they bring their responses to global events to their sessions. (Is the virus having an impact on how we all feel and respond?) What are our **responsibilities** when we speak out?

Technology: **virtual backgrounds**. **Encryption when using hotspots**.

Onlinevents: **communication** through website, email, **new onlinevents forum**.

Reading: The Three Questions   (Adaptation from Parable by Leo Tolstoy)

Week 12

Balancing one risk alongside another. The enormous challenges of **risk assessment**. Making endless comparisons with responses in other places - other countries, services, business environments, health settings etc etc? Hitting an 'overwhelm wall'. Can we focus more on the 'now' and less on 'the unknown future'?

Recording sessions: Contracts, ethical questions, service requirements. What if a client wants to hold their own recording of the session (eg as an aide to memory)? Technical issues around storing and accessing recordings.

Zoom 5: what is the current position re Zoom and **encryption/security** (free version and subscription-based versions)

What are the pitfalls/dangers around A**I devices** such as **Alexa, Siri,** etc. ? Should we ensure that we and our clients switch off such devices before engaging in sessions?

What does it do to our **attention** to our clients and **focus** if other devices are switched on (at either end)? In the face-to-face counselling room we try to remove all the **distractions** - so how do we apply this to our online experiences?

Is it possible to **return to face-to-face work** safely? What are the implications for each of us? Where do our ethical responsibilities lie as other places begin to open up? How to discuss this fully with clients who are urging us to return. (We hold responsibility for the providing the'container').

Having **choices** about how to meet with clients that were not previously available to us can sometimes feel liberating. Increases our ability to offer **flexibility**. **Blended approaches**: what does the research tell us about using these? Can this sometimes be facilitative for certain clients?

Further training to work online: how do we decide what skills we already have and what we still need to acquire? Using the **BACP Telephone and E-Counselling Competencies** as a useful measure against which to measure where we are and what we need. How will this impact on preliminary counselling training in the future? Emphasising the importance of finding safe ways to things out, so reducing risks to current and new clients.

Reading: The Mayonnaise Jar and Coffee (or 'The Jar of Life')

Week 13

Context: Considering a **global overview**. How are we doing in comparison with other countries - what is going on elsewhere? Keeping our feet on the ground despite many changes to our everyday behaviours. **Trust vs mistrust**. Regaining our confidence as our work increases and some consider returning to face-to-face work, whilst others maintain their virtual practice.

Post lockdown anxiety (resources eg: Anxiety UK blockdown. What has it been like for those who have been shielded and how does it feel for them to consider re-entering a social world, albeit slowly and gradually.

Therapist anxiety - noticing our own responses and sometimes allowing it to come into the work appropriately - sharing an experience with clients being levelling.

Children **returning to school**. Considering the developmental impact on them of being away from other children for so long. Also the impact on returning to schools that look and feel very different.

Might we sometimes be viewing our pre-Covid world through slightly rose-coloured spectacles (life has always been filled with uncertainty).

Text-based therapy and the existence of **a written 'record'** - how to deal with this (through careful contracting and establishment of agreements around this at the outset).

Working online: Self-assessment of skills and **identifying further training needs**. How to manage your professional online presence. **Digital policies** etc.

Pets in therapy - clients and therapists! Also other 'disclosures' and/or intrusions that arise when working or accessing therapy from home. How to respond.

Reading: Extract from The Mad Hatters' Tea Party (Alice's Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll.)

Week 14

Context: Thinking about differing advice and responses around the world to coronavirus. In the UK: reducing 'distancing' from 2 metres to 1... No more daily briefings….Some children returning to schools but not all...What do these things mean to each of us? Are we becoming armchair scientists?. Revisiting **'the online disinhibition effect - benign and toxic'**.

Lockdown: not quite in and not quite out. Rapid changes leading to contradictory positions. Confusion over what that might mean for us as individuals and as therapists.

Adjustment/'readjustment disorder'? Ongoing and endless **transition** (with no transition in…)   Travelling without knowing where the end-point is. The impact of this on our 'threat systems'.

Rents, room hire, reduced income pressures etc alongside our need to take responsibility for the safety of others. **The role of professional bodies** in providing advice (but also the limits to what they can say and do). **Insurance cover and Covid-19 claims** - importance of checking your position.

What risks are involved in **face-to-face work** - can we really do it safely? **Practical steps** that therapists are taking. (Eg perspex screens, completely wipeable surfaces, increased ventilation, cleaning between clients, etc.)

Using **Microsoft Teams** - what are the **pros and cons**?

Exploring the use of more **secure email providers** for sharing sensitive information (eg Protonmail)

Self-monitoring for '**fitness to practice**'. The importance of **therapeutic/clinical wills**.

Reading: "If" by Rudyard Kipling

Week 15

Context: The sobering news around **virus 'hot-spots'** - eg Leicester back in lockdown. How do we feel about those who 'throw caution to the wind' as lockdown eases in other areas? **Taking personal responsibility for decisions about face-to-face meetings** - who 'holds the power?' Finding energy for seeking out new and alternative opportunities to help clients.

The impact of **unexpected technological breakdown** on each of us - noticing heightened anxiety/panic responses. **Exhaustion** and the need for 'time off'?

The 'shift' in emphasis in this group from practical advice around online working towards a more reflective, shared compassionate space in which to explore the uncertainty and sense of endless transition? **What does the group need now**, and what might be helpful in the weeks and months ahead? (We often **work in isolation** due to the nature of our work - how to come together?)

Online work and integration, **pluralism** etc. (Breaking down borders and differences?). **The changing face of training needs** that is emerging as a result of the experiences we have all been through. Our need to self-assess and determine our individual training needs, according to how we plan to move ahead from here. The value of r**eflective and shared learning**.

Orcha - a useful resource for determining the efficacy and helpfulness of **mental health apps.**

Working online with children and addressing **safeguarding** challenges - how to find appropriate training.

Retirement and sabbaticals from therapy - how do we approach these themes?

Closing video (song): 'Waving Goodbye' Siobhan Argyle
https://twitter.com/ShivieSmith/status/1270740679996723201?s=20

Week 16

Context: The world situation and **reinstatement of lockdown** in certain places as numbers rise. The future is uncertain and unknown. **Privacy and public health** - how do we find a **balance**? What can we offer now as therapists and what do *we* need?

Taking holidays and breaks from work - feelings of **'guilt'** and how to deal with this. Supporting each other. The **physical toll** of our work when on screen all day. The need to prepare for the **increased work that is coming** as a result of the increase in difficulties during the crisis, particularly involving **loss** and **trauma**.

Thinking about our **changing training needs** - and what we have learned, through the crisis about learning! (Creating '**communities of learning**'). Our 'accelerated developmental processes' online and with technology.

Revisiting **risk assessment working face-to-face** with clients - is it possible to create safe spaces, especially in the light of new information about how the virus is transmitted (by aerosol spray more than via surfaces etc)? Many more upcoming dilemmas.

Onlinevents new forum: a dedicated networking space to come together, ask questions, meet colleagues etc.

Closing poem: The Blind Men and the Elephant

Week 17

Context: **Ongoing struggle**s around the world and **sporadic outbreaks** (UK and overseas). **Confusing messages**: eg 'getting back to normal' vs 'the 2nd wave'. Some are managing a return to working in the room, others see online working as a long-term approach. **Mandatory face masks** from today in certain places, eg shops etc. **Proportionality** of our responses

Government regulations around **PPE** and updated advice from our professional bodies. '**Mitigation**' of risk rather than **risk 'prevention'**. As the scientific advice changes, so do the recommendations.

How to connect with others despite barriers and *choosing* which barriers are least intrusive (eg virtual contact vs speaking behind a screen/wearing a mask or visor). **Working with materials** which may spread infection (eg sand tray); is it possible to reproduce this work online?

Scientific evidence about virus transmission is scant and contradictory at the moment - so we work with probability rather than factual evidence.

Technological fatigue; speed of innovation and learning leading to exhaustion. Checking devices constantly - a form of OCD?

Meditation and readings from these sessions: booklet available plus voluntary charitable donation (see resource guide).

Closing poem: The Road Less Taken (Robert Frost)