

19 March 2020

BPC Covid-19 GUIDELINES 2

We are closely monitoring the UK Government guidelines on Coronavirus. The BPC office is continuing to operate as usual however due to the ongoing advice from the Government we have decided to put measures in place to enable our staff to work from home to protect them and reduce the risk of the virus spreading.

We are aware that a number of our Registrants have started to introduce or have already introduced measures such as moving to online therapy and telephone sessions. We would like to assure Registrants that we are aware of the difficult circumstances and recognise that Registrants may need to make such changes to ensure ongoing support to their patients. Once again we encourage Registrants to use their professional judgement and assess risk to deliver safe care informed by the values and principles set out in our ethical standards and guidelines. How to manage this new and unparalleled situation clinically has to be an individual professional decision. Registrants are advised to consult a senior colleague if unsure about a clinical issue in this context. In order to assist Registrants in making changes to their work practices the following general guidelines may be helpful:

- Patients can be offered online/telephone sessions. It can be explained to them that although this is different, it still can be an effective therapeutic experience, and that they need to find a quiet and uninterrupted space to have their sessions.
- Registrants should make a plan which is communicated to each patient. For registrants working in institutions, those guidelines and requirements will have to be followed first.
- Registrants should make themselves aware of the differences between providing online/telephone and face to face psychotherapy. They should consider the impact this may have on the relationship between the therapist and patient and whether this move is appropriate for the patient.
- Registrants should take appropriate software/hardware measures to ensure the safety and confidentiality of online therapy and they may want to check which software is most secure. There are many providers available and many people use Zoom although we cannot recommend a specific provider.
- Registrants should discuss in advance with the patient what measures they are putting in place to protect their confidentiality whether the therapy is online or on the telephone and explore how the patient can ensure they have a safe and confidential physical space to participate in the session remotely.
- Registrants should continue to be aware of the obligations in relation to privacy and confidentiality as set out in the GDPR guidelines and our GDPR briefing.
- We have contacted Howden and Towergate, the two major insurance providers in this field, that have confirmed all of their policies cover Skype, Zoom and any other online platform, as well as telephone sessions. If in doubt, registrants should check with their insurance company in order to ensure that they are able to provide online/telephone therapy and have the relevant insurance cover.
- We recognise that many registrants may face a reduction in their practice. We would encourage registrants to maintain records of financial losses in order to be able to claim if government offers financial support relevant to those working in private practice.