

# Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion Therapy in the UK



January 2015

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- 1 The purpose of this memorandum of understanding (MoU) is to set out an agreed framework for activities by the parties concerned to help address the issues raised by the practice of conversion therapy in the UK.<sup>1</sup>
- 2 The MoU is informed by a position that efforts to try to change or alter sexual orientation through psychological therapies are unethical and potentially harmful.
- 3 This position is not intended to discourage clients with conflicted feelings around sexuality seeking help. Psychological therapists routinely work with people who are struggling with inner conflict. 'For people who are unhappy about their sexual orientation – whether heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual – there may be grounds for exploring therapeutic options to help them live more comfortably with it, reduce their distress and reach a greater degree of acceptance of their sexual orientation.'<sup>2</sup>
- 4 The MoU follows a meeting in April 2014 of professional associations, statutory and voluntary regulators, government departments, NHS England and campaigning groups.
- 5 At the meeting the organisations recognised a shared commitment to protecting the public from the risks of conversion therapy.

## Background

- 6 There has been a long history of medical and psychological professions seeing homosexuality as a form of arrested sexual development. Up until 1974 the American Psychiatric Association classified homosexuality as a mental illness. In 1992 the World Health Organisation declassified homosexuality as a mental disorder.
- 7 Awareness of the prevalence of conversion therapy in the UK grew following the publication of research in 2009 which revealed that 1 in 6 psychological therapists had engaged clients in efforts to change their sexual orientation.<sup>3</sup>
- 8 Several professional bodies have reviewed the evidence around conversion therapy and concluded there is no good evidence that it works, while there is evidence that it has the potential to cause harm.<sup>4,5,6</sup>

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1 'Conversion therapy' is the umbrella term for a type of talking therapy or activity which attempts to change sexual orientation or reduce attraction to others of the same sex. It is also sometimes called 'reparative' or 'gay cure' therapy.

2 Royal College of Psychiatrists (2014), 'Royal College of Psychiatrists' statement on sexual orientation'. London: Royal College of Psychiatrists [http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/pdf/PS02\\_2014.pdf](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/pdf/PS02_2014.pdf)

3 Annie Bartlett, Glenn Smith, Michael King (2009). 'The response of mental health professionals to clients seeking help to change or redirect same-sex sexual orientation'. BMC Psychiatry. March 2009, Vol. 9, No. 11. <http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/68888/>

4 UKCP (2014), 'Conversion therapy: consensus statement'. London: UK Council for Psychotherapy [http://www.ukcp.org.uk/UKCP\\_Documents/policy/Conversion%20therapy.pdf](http://www.ukcp.org.uk/UKCP_Documents/policy/Conversion%20therapy.pdf)

5 APA Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation (2009), Report of the task force on appropriate therapeutic responses to sexual orientation. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association <http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/therapeutic-response.pdf>

6 Royal College of Psychiatrists, 'Psychiatry and LGB people'. [Online] [Accessed 1 November 2014]. <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/members/specialinterestgroups/gaylesbian/submissiontothecofe/psychiatryandlgbpeople.aspx>

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- 9 All the major psychological professional bodies in the UK have concluded that conversion therapy is unethical and potentially harmful. Statements to this effect have been disseminated among psychological professionals.
  - 10 The organisations undersigned are committed to ensuring that all members of the public can confidently access safe and high-quality psychological therapies.

## Goals and objectives

- 11 The aim of the commitments contained in this MoU are to ensure that:
  - The public are well informed about the evidence and risks of conversion therapy;
  - Healthcare professionals and psychological therapists are aware of the ethical issues relating to conversion therapy;
  - New and existing psychological therapists are appropriately trained to competently deal with requests for conversion therapy and to support clients in distress;
  - Professionals from across the health, care and psychological professions work together to promote the public interest.

## Roles and responsibilities

- 12 While all parties share a common interest, their remits and responsibilities differ.
- 13 This MoU does not exhaustively list every action which every organisation will take but sets out a framework for how organisations will respond to the issue in areas where they do have responsibility.
- 14 For organisations with practitioner members, each will review their statements of ethical practice, and consider the need for the publication of a specific ethical statement concerning conversion therapy;
- 15 Professional associations will work to ensure their memberships have access to the latest information regarding conversion therapy;
- 16 Professional associations will strongly endeavour to make continuing professional development (CPD) events available which help develop therapists' understanding and cultural competence in working with lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) clients;
- 17 Organisations will work together to create a shared information resource on conversion therapy, including Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and help and support for both members of the public and professionals;
- 18 Those with a responsibility for training will work to ensure that trainings prepare therapists to sufficient levels of cultural competence so they can work effectively with LGB clients;
- 19 Training organisations will refer to the British Psychological Society guidelines on working with gender and sexual minority clients when reviewing their curriculum on equality and diversity issues<sup>7</sup>;

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<sup>7</sup> British Psychological Society (2012). Guidelines and literature review for psychologists working therapeutically with sexual and gender minority clients. London: British Psychological Society. <http://www.bpsshop.org.uk/Guidelines-and-literature-review-for-psychologists-working-therapeutically-with-sexual-and-gender-minority-clients-P2267.aspx>

- 20 Auditing and accrediting organisations will review their current guidelines and policies and consider the need to include more specific requirements to ensure individual practitioners and training organisations demonstrate awareness and understanding of policy regarding conversion therapy;
- 21 Campaigning bodies will work to ensure that the public are aware of the basis for concern about any ongoing practice of conversion therapy;
- 22 Where appropriate, the organisations undersigned will ensure that there is board-level support in carrying out the necessary measures to meet the commitments within the MoU;
- 23 NHS England does not endorse or support conversion therapy and will make this clear to Clinical Commissioning Groups.

## Review

- 24 The organisations will meet in January 2015 to review progress on the areas identified in the MoU and share best practice. This meeting will be hosted by the Department of Health.
- 25 The organisations undersigned will review the MoU 12 months after publication.

## Mutual understanding

- 26 The memorandum is not intended to and does not create any contractual obligations between these parties.
- 27 Instead, this memorandum is signed in recognition of a shared professional responsibility to improve the support and help available to those at risk from unethical and potentially harmful conversion therapy.



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