

Response by the Registered Counsellors and Psychometrists (RCP) division of PSYSSA to the article posted on www.therapistsonline.co.za by Prof HG Pretorius titled “HPCSA: Understanding the role of Registered Counsellor in the profession of psychology in South Africa”

On review of the above mentioned article on a public website the following observations and concerns have been raised:

1. In the second paragraph the statement was made “Unfortunately, the category was often misunderstood and Registered Counsellors were trained to act as mini-Psychologists”. There is no factual evidence of these practices provided in the article to back up this statement and therefore it can be viewed as a personal as opposed to a professional opinion.

HPCSA Form 236 (Training and Examinations Guidelines for Registered Counsellors (Trauma)) under the heading of Practicum (1) states the minimum exposure which Registered Counsellors must obtain and they include:

- Be familiar with the DSM IV – TR diagnostic categorization of trauma;
- Acquire the skill to distinguish PTSD from other psychiatric and mental health conditions;
- Be able to categorise traumatic stress responses according to the DSM IV – TR
- Familiarity with traumatic stress assessment instruments and their strengths and limitations.
- Be able to identify appropriate intervention strategies on the basis of assessment procedures, and follow appropriate referral procedures where necessary.

It is clear from the above points from HPCSA Form 236 that appropriate knowledge of the DSM IV – TR is critical to the role of the Registered Counsellor and for the best care of their clients. This DSM IV – TR knowledge is also vital as it informs the Registered Counsellor when they are dealing with a client/s whose symptoms are outside of their Scope of Practice (dated 02 September 2011) and therefore an appropriate referral can be made.

2. The paragraph continues and states “It is important to note that the philosophy of the category is not that of Psychologists and not to provide curative or therapeutic interventions on a one-on-one basis”.

There is some misunderstanding created by this sentence. Firstly it is agreed that Registered Counsellors provide *counselling* services and not therapeutic services (refer to Scope of Practice dd 02 September 2011).

But when referencing HPCSA Form 258 (Framework for education, training, registration and scope of Registered Counsellors) it states “The role of the Registered Counsellor is to make psychological services accessible to the diverse South African population and to provide psychological and preventative interventions that focus on support and promote the enhancement of wellbeing in community contexts. This includes **individuals** (*emphasis added*), families, groups, communities and excludes psychotherapeutic interventions”

The stated confusion exists as it firstly implies that therapeutic interventions can be done by a Registered Counsellor with groups (as long as it is not in a one-on-one situation) or secondly that a Registered Counsellor may not see clients on a one-on-one basis. Both of these points are however answered in Form 258. A Registered Counsellor may see clients on an individual/one-on-one basis.

3. The third paragraph makes the statement that “The purpose of Registered Counsellors is to firstly act as “emotional paramedics” in cases of trauma, to intervene appropriately, and to refer when and where necessary.” The term “emotional paramedic” does not appear in any HPCSA documentation and is certainly not mentioned in any HPCSA documentation relating to Registered Counsellors.

A quick google search with the term “emotional paramedics” takes you to a site which relates to volunteer counsellors who have had a short 100 hours exposure to a Trauma Intervention Program. (Chicago Tribune. (2013) Retrieved April 22, 2016, from http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2013-05-22/health/sc-health-0522-trauma-support-20130522_1_trauma-intervention-program-paramedics-volunteers).

The training mentioned above cannot be compared with the academic and practical requirements of a Registered Counsellor (Form 236 and Form 258) with the Board of Psychology at the HPCSA.

The usage of this term undermines the Scope of Practice of a Registered Counsellor and creates a false impression with the public of South Africa about the scope of services a Registered Counsellor is trained and competent to provide.

4. The fourth paragraph states “A B.Psych curriculum is an integrated one and cannot be achieved (as is erroneously believed), by adding a six month internship to an academic honours degree”.

Form 258 under the heading of “Options for offering the B Psych programme” states “An accredited 4 year B Psych or Honours degree in Psychology accredited by the Board as equivalent to the B Psych degree that incorporates an approved 6 month/ or 720 hour face to face practicum.’

Form 236 states “Be in possession of an accredited 4-year B.Psych degree (or an honours degree in psychology that has been accredited by the Board as **equivalent** to the B.Psych), which includes modules on trauma counselling.” The second requirement is the completion of an approved 6 month full time or approved 12 month practicum.

Form 258 and Form 236 both state that a Board approved academic honours degree (with the appropriate subject choices) can be used as an application for a practicum and thereafter (once all Board requirements met) application to write the Board exam for Registered Counsellors.

The stated paragraph in the article does not accurately reflect the full criteria around the academic requirements for Registered Counsellors.

This article is needed to inform both the public and other professionals (e.g. Psychologists and Psychometrists) about the scope of practice of a Registered Counsellor.

The aspects mentioned above relate to areas of the article which are not in line with Form 236 and Form 258 and has the possibility of creating a greater misunderstanding of the role of a Registered Counsellor and their associated scope of practice.

In the light of article being placed on a public website (www.therapistonline.co.za) and the role (and related impact) which Prof Pretorius has within the HPCSA it is requested that these aspects be addressed in a public domain and that this article be placed on and linked to the article “HPCSA: Understanding the role of Registered Counsellor in the profession of psychology in South Africa”.

Regards

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