

Systemic thinking and practice intermediate level training

I currently work on a specialist CAMHS inpatient eating disorder ward working with young people and their families to support the young person through their recovery. To do this, I am part of the reflecting team during the family therapy clinic, and I run a multi-family therapy day group with the ward's family therapist delivering multi-family therapy based on the Maudsley model. In order to develop my skills in systemic thinking and practice I undertook the foundation year in systemic thinking and practice which allowed me to begin to gain a better understanding of systemic theory. I found this was very beneficial both to myself, my team and the young people and families that I work with. Therefore, in order to develop my understanding further and develop my skills in this way of working I was lucky enough to gain funding from FPSA to take the intermediate level training in systemic thinking and practice.

NICE guidelines recommend that treatment for children and young people with eating disorders should include the whole family. However, despite this recommendation, at present the eating disorder ward I work on, only has one part-time family systemic therapist who works 2 days a week. Therefore, accessing this training has been invaluable for the ward as it has allowed me to develop these systemic skills enabling me to be more competent and confident in putting these into practice on the ward. A key learning point has been understanding how unhelpful behaviours are maintained through circularity relationships and how the family life cycle model can be used to explain this but without attributing blame. This training has developed my understanding further of the importance of considering an individual's systems and considering their relationships and the interactions and dynamics of these when considering their behaviours and the functions of these.

Throughout the course my confidence in my skills and abilities has grown, which, alongside a greater understanding of systemic ideas, has impacted greatly on my practice. I have learnt new skills and feel more at ease trying new ways of working and experimenting with different approaches and techniques. The idea that I feel has been most important to me during the course, has been able to recognise that different models and theories can be used at different times between families or within sessions with the same families. Meaning that you can simultaneously appreciate and challenge different theories and models appreciating their values while acknowledging their constraints. For example, if a young person is seriously ill with an eating disorder it can be vital that the parents understand the severity of the illness and how to help their child become physically stable, which requires an expert position and a more structural approach. However, as the child begins to recover a more narrative approach can be taken to help the family to develop new narratives and recognise their strengths in the fight against the eating disorder. This has been important as it links to the FT-AN treatment model we used on the ward and has enhanced my understanding of this, meaning I am able to put this into practice more confidently and guide my colleagues in developing their understanding also.

Furthermore, I have also continued to develop my understanding and learning around social difference. I feel more confident exploring how these may be influencing my practice or how they may be influencing how the young person or family may relate to me. I have reflected on my own upbringing and I am beginning to understand how my experiences and relationships with my own family influence how I interpret other families. Thus, I am more aware and mindful of this and feel better able to challenge my ideas, thoughts and feelings which in turn enhances my practice.

Without this generous grant, I would not have been able to take this invaluable training which has been vital in developing my systemic skills. I am very grateful that I have been given this opportunity thanks to the FPSA.