**INTRODUCING THE COLLEGE COUNSELLOR**

**INFORMATION FOR COLLEGES**

The College Counsellor is a funded, contracted service offering a fully qualified and insured on-site Counsellor on a (week)day or half day provision as required. The College Counsellor is present in College as a satellite provision of the University Counselling Service, and remains employed by them.

**Is counselling provided in college any different from the counselling provided at the central university counselling service?**

No. The counselling provided in-house within the College is exactly the same as that provided through the central service. Most College Counsellors spend a portion of their working time at the central service and the remainder in college.

Just as in the central service, the role of the Counsellor is to work with students in a relatively brief and focused way to get them feeling and functioning better as rapidly as possible. This generally means one to three sessions, though a College Counsellor will always exercise clinical judgement when assessing student needs and prioritise accordingly.

The College Counsellor benefits from administrative support and clinical supervision from the central counselling service, and can also refer students to groups/workshops in the central service and, where appropriate, for a consultation with the counselling service medical consultant (psychiatrist).

The College Counsellor’s commitment to confidentiality is also the same as if the student were seen in the central service: except in cases of imminent risk. In cases of imminent risk, the College Counsellor will follow appropriate University procedures which may involve confidential liaison with an appropriate member(s) of the College Welfare Team. There is no formal or informal discussion of an individual student with any member of college without that student’s express permission. However, confidential liaison with a College Counsellor relating to an *anonymised* student case is permitted

The counselling experience begins with initial email contact and pre-intake paperwork, to activate an initial assessment. At this stage a first session is arranged in which student and Counsellor work together to make sense of the student’s experience, to conceptualise his/her/their problems in new ways and to think together about how best to move forward. In some cases a single session is sufficient, whilst in other cases further sessions may be appropriate. Students who may benefit from using NHS services, or other services available via the counselling service, are encouraged and supported to access these.

**What are the benefits of having a College Counsellor?**

Although the college counsellor is providing exactly the same service as the Counsellors in the central service, there are a number of benefits to having a Counsellor on-site.

* Increases counselling resource and points of access available to students.
* Makes counselling feel more accessible to some students. There is evidence that some students—predominantly undergraduates, especially first-years—regard making an appointment with the central service as a significant and even frightening step, and these students may delay seeking help to their detriment. For these students, having an in-house Counsellor who is a familiar face within the College and whom they can meet in the College setting may encourage prompt and timely help-seeking.
* The College Counsellor can be available, upon request, as a resource to others in College with designated welfare roles, who may concerned about how best to support a student.

**Are there any disadvantages to seeing a College Counsellor?**

Whether to see an in-house Counsellor or a Counsellor at the central service is entirely a matter of individual student preference.

We noted above that some students feel safer or more comfortable seeing a Counsellor in College. But of course others feel exactly the opposite: to these students, it feels better/safer to do this away from the setting in which they live and work. It should be emphasised that this is nothing to do with confidentiality: strict confidentiality will be maintained by the Counsellor irrespective of where the counselling session takes place. This is purely an issue of what feels most comfortable to the individual.

A student may have a strong preference to see a Counsellor of a different gender from the in-house Counsellor. This would also be a good reason for an individual to approach the central service, being clear about the gender preference.

The availability of a College Counsellor is more limited, being a fixed day or half-day a week, so those students, who for academic reasons, need to see a Counsellor in the evening, or a Saturday morning, are encouraged to contact the central service, where a greater variety of appointment times can be offered. For the same reasons, students absent from Oxford for academic reasons or for reasons of suspension, may appropriately wish to access online counselling. Skype counselling is available from the central university counselling service.

**How does counselling within the university fit with NHS mental health services?**

Although many Colleges are working to increase counselling provision to their students, it should be emphasised that this provision is not a substitute for NHS provision of specialist mental health services. The experience of the university counselling service is that, for the majority of students, the issues which need to be addressed to resolve student difficulties are often developmental in nature, and/or have arisen in response to specific, difficult life circumstances and challenges (e.g. managing the transition to/from university, coping with academic demands, dealing with bereavement or other adverse life events) and are best addressed within a non-medical, transdiagnostic model.

Students who may benefit from using specialist NHS services—either alongside or instead of university services—are encouraged and supported to access these.

**Description of Services**

The College Counsellor role is designed to bring the benefit of in-house provision to a college through the structures, procedures and support of an experienced university service. The contract entered into by an individual college and the central service will detail the infrastructure the College is required to provide in terms of work space, IT support etc, and the services which will be offered by the individual Counsellor in addition to individual client hours, such as clinical consultation, attendance at welfare meetings, workshops etc. Should you have any queries about the description of Counsellor services offered to your College, please contact the Head of Service, Alan Percy, at the university counselling service for further clarification.

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