



CYBER SUPERVISION

ANNE STOKES

Normally I finish writing this column at least two weeks before the deadline for submission, which gives me time to reflect on what's been written and then get it in ahead of time. This time, while I will meet the deadline, it will be a tight run thing! The reason – a virus. No, not a virus in my computer, but one in my body ☺. Nearly four weeks ago, I succumbed to a horrid virus, which apart from manifesting in a cold, a cough and nausea, rendered me incredibly weak. I am usually an extremely healthy person, so this was a new experience for me.

You may wonder why I am telling you this – what has it got to do with online supervision? Well, it raised all sorts of ethical dilemmas for me. If I had been working f2f, I would have cancelled

supervision, as to sit with supervisees while snuffling and choking away would have been extremely distracting for them (and me) and also I would have been worried about infecting them. It didn't feel such a straightforward decision with my online work. Was I well enough to answer emails? I was certainly able to read them, and felt that I could make my responses professionally and with the same degree of awareness as normal. But was I deluding myself? Was I in a place to be able to make that judgement soundly? At one point my temperature was 103.5, and I am told that at 104, you start hallucinating! How near to that was I?

Then there were my synchronous supervisees. I did ask video and voice supervisees if they would change to text

only, and explained why. Was that fair on supervisees? Did their awareness that I was unwell affect their ability to concentrate on what they wanted to bring, or might they have felt the need to take care of me during our session? On the other hand, was it more important for them and their clients that they did at least have supervision?

I don't have any answers at the moment, but it has caused me to reflect on both where to draw the line in carrying on working, and whether we are always able to make the judgement about ourselves. My online supervisor was away, and with hindsight it would have been wise to talk to a trusted online peer. I also have thought long and hard about what I would say to my own online supervisees in

Ethics & Viruses

the same position. The [Ethical Framework of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy](#) (BACP) for f2f practice states that:

“practitioners have a responsibility to monitor and maintain their fitness to practice at a level that enables them to provide an effective service. If their effectiveness becomes impaired for any reason, including health or personal circumstances, they should seek the advice of their supervisor or experienced colleagues, and if necessary withdraw from practice till their fitness to practice returns”.

That is sound advice, but it may not be that straightforward. I can think of personal circumstances and health issues that would definitely cause me to stop practicing

at least temporarily, or to recommend to supervisees that they consider doing the same. However, there is a grey area – a bereavement which from the outside might seem to be of a close relative, but for the practitioner involved is actually not so. The level of physical pain which can be coped with before interfering with the ability to work effectively will vary from person to person. What has been brought home to me is the need to involve another person in my decision making process, to challenge what might be skewed thinking.

As I write this column, I am aware of feeling quite vulnerable, as I am opening myself up to criticism and judgement from fellow practitioners. However, I

decided that I would still reflect on the dilemma here, as it has brought home to me the difference from f2f work in the decision making process around my ability to work ethically online. I would be interested in hearing about other people’s experiences, both from a supervisor and a supervisee perspective.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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