



CYBER SUPERVISION

ANNE STOKES

This edition's column is written with grateful thanks to Jan Stiff. Jan was a student on the Diploma in Online Therapeutic Supervision recently and used a teaching and learning session to introduce an online supervision model she had adapted from a GP consultation model for use with trainees. Jan's original career was in nursing and she is married to a GP. She now works online, particularly with young people.

It is refreshing and illuminating to consider models from other professions, to discover if / how they might add to our own body of knowledge and way of offering online supervision.

The model Jan presented is based on Roger Neighbour's work, 'The Inner Consultation'

(2004) and is intended to be a practical approach rather than a theoretical one. Combining that awareness with the reflectiveness of the words 'inner consultation' had me hooked, as did the assertion by Neighbour that this is a journey rather than a destination – echoes of Egan!

As a visual person, I find Neighbour's way of illustrating the 5 checkpoints of the journey really helpful. He shows a hand with five named fingers:

- Housekeeping
- Connect
- Summarize
- Handover
- Safety net

There's a resonance with Page and Wosket's cyclical model (1994), which regular

readers know that I like and have adapted for online work. However, I believe that this model adds important 'extras'. The interpretations of the checkpoints made here are mine, rather than Jan's or Neighbours.

Both Housekeeping and Connecting are vital parts of online supervision, and can sometimes be missed, particularly in email supervision. Here we may not take the time to do the 'work around the edges' that happens in f2f supervision, where we take a few minutes to attend to attend to practical matters and re-connect in a more general sense, before focusing on client work. Housekeeping also includes looking after oneself - and this could include supervision of supervision.

Hands & Hills in Online Supervision

Summarising and therefore checking that we have understood our supervisee, or our supervisor, is at the heart of online supervision. As we so often say 'there's no body language, so needs doing through words'. We know it, and we sometimes forget, so online misunderstandings happen! It's valuable to have this in the checklist.

In online supervision we reach a point in a session where we must trust the supervisee and handover, or hand back, the client work to them. We have done what we can together, and it is time to let go for this moment.

The idea of safety netting appeals to me, as it is perhaps an area that is paid less attention in online supervision. We don't see whether our

supervisee is looking less physically well, more tired - even when using video links this can be tricky. Then there is safety netting around technology - how are we safeguarding clients? Are we aware of changing perspectives within the online world? For example, we might consider security and confidentiality in light of recent revelations about the monitoring activities of the US and UK governments.

Having become enthralled by making my own connections around Neighbour's model, I searched for anyone building on it and found the work of Ian McKelvey (2010), who developed a further model, 'The consultation hill'. Again this appeals to my visual senses. McKelvey also has 5 stages (Is there a 'law' stating

that 5 items are the ideal number to remember?) which are:

- Preparation (base camp)
- Ascent
- Shared summit
- Descent
- Reflection

What a fabulous model on which to base online supervision. Obviously how I am interpreting those stages is completely different from McKelvey's use of them with trainee GPs. I love this analogy with climbing - in my mind, online supervision is sometimes like climbing Everest, and sometimes a mere stroll up a hill, but hopefully both with the same sense of achievement.

Base camp: the place where supervisor and supervisee



CYBER^{continued}SUPERVISION

prepare for the session, individually and later together. So ensuring that any pre-session information is exchanged by email, that back-up systems are in place in case of internet problems – in my case, making sure I do check my mobile phone regularly, and it's switched to vibrate for a live session – as well as thinking back to last session in case anything needs bringing back. Together in base camp, we might set goals/an agenda for a live session or, in email supervision, state what we want from our supervisor this time. Then we are ready to climb.

For me, the ascent covers the hard work, as well as admiring the view or simply 'stopping to stare' in order for ideas to flow

about the counselling process. It's about glorying in creativity – on the mountain, the beauty of our world; online through creative ways of understanding the process – as well as getting lost in swirling mists, and maybe having to stand still till it clears.

The shared summit is achieved – we've reached our joint goal. In synchronous sessions, that can be easier to notice together. Do we check on this, and celebrate enough in asynchronous supervision? How have we achieved the summit? Has the climb been supervisee-led, with the supervisor providing a safe 'tail'?

My vision of the descent is that part of supervision when we

think how the work is taken back to our online clients. We are coming back to the day-to-day work of the counsellor. This may be done together, or in the case of email supervision, through follow-up emails.

Lastly comes reflection. We are back at base camp, together or alone. What has worked well? What needs to be changed? How can I feed things back effectively to my supervisor/supervisee? Do I need to do this in a live session? Is it better done by email? Have I paid enough attention to the online relationship to be able to say what needs saying?

What a pleasure it has been to explore these new-to-me models. Thank you, Jan, for setting me off on the journey!

REFERENCES

McKelvey, I. (2010). The Consultation Hill. *British Journal of General Practice*. 60 (576) 538 -540 www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2894394 accessed 18.6.13

Neighbour, R. (2004). *The Inner Consultation: how to develop an effective and intuitive consulting style*. Oxford Radcliffe Medical Press

Page, S. & Woskett, V. (1994). *Supervising the counsellor: a cyclical model*. London Routledge

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anne Stokes is based in Hampshire, UK, and is a well-known online therapist, supervisor and trainer and [Director of Online Training Ltd](#). She can be contacted at anne.stokes4@btinternet.com.