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BECOMING A PSYCHOTHERAPIST

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Abstract: *Professional development in psychotherapy represents a major impact theory in every psychotherapist's life. For a period of at least four year his professional life will be directed towards training meetings and his life will change. For a practitioner life goes on according to clients schedules. This material proposes an approach of a few of the most important aspects of professional development in psychotherapy, but also the perspective of the future psychotherapist. The aspects underlined represent the consequence of the trainer's activity in an association of integrative psychotherapy training.*

Keywords: *professional development, psychotherapy, trainee.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Training in psychotherapy represents for many colleagues a desire that can become reality; still it demands a profound analysis of numerous factors. In a country in which psychotherapy has found its way with difficulty, during the last 24years, a paradox has appeared: the Psychologists' College from Romania (C.O.P.S.I.) over 30 professional associations demanded an authorization to become suppliers of professional development. Regardless all these, accredited associations of the forum mentioned represent only a small number of associations that can start courses of professional development in different forms of psychotherapy with a duration of at least four years.

The Psychologists' College from Romania trusts these associations and recognizes their right to become suppliers of professional development in a form of psychotherapy, if these hold at least four accredited trainers as main psychotherapists in the therapeutic training they promote.

A superposition of meanings is observed when there is a talk about competency, aptitude and capability. Sperry L [4] realizes delimitation between the concepts mentioned.

a. Competency

The competency refers to the potential or the capacity to perform and to implicate a large spectrum of professional capacities given by an external standard. Among the capacities needed for a competency the following can be mentioned: the capacity of a critical thinking, the capacity to analysis, a professional judgement in a clinical evaluation, decisions taken on the basis of an evaluation etc. Moreover, the competency represents the capacity to evaluate and to modify a decision by reflexive judgement. [2]

Kaslow [1] states that through a competency we refer to aptitudes, attitudes and the manner in which these are integrated. Competencies represent interactive of an integrative knowledge, "aptitudes, abilities, behaviours and strategies, believes, values, personal dispositions and characteristics, perceptions of the self and the person's

motivation that make him/her able to fulfil the objectives proposed”.

Clinical practice reflects competencies that can be evaluated according to professional standards and which can be developed through professional trainings. [2] In an ideal manner, a professional development can offer an experience of integrated learning where knowledge, aptitudes and attitudes interact and become clinical competencies. From the definitions offered to the term competency five themes can be generated [4]:

- capacity;
- integration of knowledge, aptitudes and attitudes;
- competencies that are exercised for the benefit of others;
- the evaluation of competencies is realized on the basis of a standard;
- the competency enhancement and development is made on the basis of professional development and through reflection.

a. Competency vs. aptitudes

In most cases the terms competency and aptitudes are considered synonyms:

- a clinical competency is composed of knowledge, aptitudes, attitudes and behaviours necessary for professional practice;
- the aptitude is a simple capacity gained through training but which doesn't hold the components of attitude or an exterior standard of evaluation.

b. Capability

The capability represents the person's conviction that he/she can overcome the minimum standard of acquisition of a competency and also expresses the capacity to change circumstances when knowledge is extended and performance is improved. In psychotherapy capability refers to the endeavour of becoming an expert or a master in therapy. [5]

The psychotherapy domain is determined by three factors:

- the therapist's vocation for psychotherapy;
- strategies of developing an expertise;
- the manner of exercise of therapeutic practice.

Becoming a competent professional supposes the capacity to properly and efficiently use knowledge, aptitudes and

attitudes in order to perform professional activity at a high level. Becoming a professional supposes the acquisition of a content of competencies. The profession demands the following of five stages [3]:

a. beginner – the psychotherapist has a limited knowledge and understanding of how to analyse problems; he holds a set of principles and techniques that he applies without expertise;

b. advanced beginner psychotherapist - he has a limited capacity for pattern knowledge and in the application of intervention techniques. Moreover, in this stage the therapists have difficulties in generating acquisitions for new situations and new clients. The rules and principles previously learnt become guidelines;

c. minimally competent psychotherapist - he works independently, he has learnt a minimum level of competencies necessary for the practicing of an independent business. Psychotherapist in this stage can conceive plans of psychotherapeutic intervention adapted to the clients' needs;

d. proficient - the psychotherapist has a greater integrative understanding of the client and his performance and activity is guided by flexibility and understanding all therapy conditions. During this stage, the therapist is capable to organize professional development trainings and to supervise other colleagues;

e. expert - the psychotherapist has a great intuition and rapidly evaluates cases, recognizes when interventions must be changed. The expert therapist's professional and private lives are integrated, being efficient as consultants and supervisors. He is often admired by his clients and considered master therapist.

Competency elements represent key activities, subdivisions of the activities described in the competency unity from the standard of professional development as a relevant and evaluable result.

The realization criteria represent qualitative landmarks associated to the results of activities from competency elements and are considered to be fulfilled when the competency elements are correctly and independently realized by the trainee.



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2. TRAINING FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE ASSOCIATION OF TRAINING IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

The image of a professional association of training in psychotherapy is realized in time and it is created by verticality, by a continuous professional development, by the trainers' professional experience, on one side, and on the other side by the clients' content, professional training and the trust that they will become what they have proposed to.

Maintaining a positive image objectively based on the market of suppliers of professional development in psychotherapy is one of the main objectives of a training association.

Another objective of the association of formation in psychotherapy is to create from trainees, future psychotherapists, an ethos of the great family of therapist to which these belong to. In this process of creation of the ethos, the trainees are explained that the respect manifested towards their formation colleagues is also extended to colleagues from other therapeutic orientations.

Colleagues are remembered that "All roads lead to Rome", that the respect for other therapeutic orientations express for a future therapist the respect offered to him. The same respect is reflected in the relation with the client. The therapeutic relation is a mutual one, in which the client's needs are respected and the therapist's qualities (empathy, authenticity, respect, congruence etc.) represent the main ingredients of the therapeutic success.

The key to success of an association of training in psychotherapy is to maintain a standard of professional and personal development, to offer clients the maximum possible of trainers' competency. The trainers' competency is the consequence of continuous professional development, of a solid personal development. In the same manner as clients are unique, future therapists found in training are also unique, they have their own needs for development, and they are found in different stages of personal development and have different levels of

knowledge. The trainer's task is difficult and maybe his most important quality is relational flexibility. With every trainee a unique professional connection is established and the trainee being part of a group the connection made by the trainer with the trainee group is also unique.

The trainer needs updated theoretical training, being the main person that opens for the trainee an epistemic knowledge door. The substantiation of theoretical knowledge transmitted is meaningless without examples offered by the trainer's clinical practice. The future psychotherapists are adult persons and leaning for adults is different from leaning for students. Here an intervention of trainer therapist's ability is observed, to make himself understood, to transmit the information on the most appropriate communication channel to the trainee. The mastery needed to realize the objective of transmitting information is called pedagogic tact.

Trainees have the tendency to "copy" the trainer, fact which is explained in the beginning of becoming a therapist, because the external reference is represented by the trainer and the supervisor. Still, the external supervisor will be internalized and the trainee is explained that he will "grow" inside his own internal supervisor, created by his style of therapeutic intervention. This is the final purpose of the psychotherapist's development, to create his own psychotherapeutic style.

Ethic and professional codes intervene if there are serious deviations from therapeutic practice and from professional development ethics from the trainer's side.

3. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACCORDING TO THE TRAINEE, THE FUTURE PSYCHOTHERAPIST

The process of becoming a psychotherapist trainee is not an easy one. The decision to start a professional development in psychotherapy supposes the intervention of more factors: costs, time and delegations.

Training in integrative psychotherapy is a new field in Romania. During each module the student tries to find answers to the most frequent questions: “what is integrative psychotherapy?” and “what have we learned in order to become a psychotherapist?”. The first question receives an answer during each module in a direct and indirect manner, thus: integrative psychotherapy represent a form of psychotherapy which has at its basis a theoretical model, it uses intervention techniques from different forms of psychotherapy and it is also based on a therapeutic relation co-created between the therapist and the client. Training in psychotherapy and personal development need to be realized according to a certain standard of training, which contains the necessary competencies for professional development and in order to become a psychotherapist that knows all types of psychotherapy.

Each professional and personal development module desires to develop more competencies from the training standard, an ideal to be realized by impossible to realize entirely. Beginner therapists need “recipes” of intervention or are in a hurry to reach objectives with their clients. They feel that these don’t follow this plan they have a feeling of insufficiency. The therapist patience and his respect for the client’s rhythm are essential in finalizing a case. The therapist’s patience is an aptitude that is formed and cultivated.

Competencies are formed, practices and refined with each client in therapy. One of the most important competencies in therapy is the research competency and it insists on the sensitised and encouragement of students to start a quantitative and a qualitative research. During the training programme the putting down of thoughts is practiced, in a reflexive research journal, and during the personal development modules, students write down their observations in personal development journals. Trainees are used to writing down observations in journals (observation is refined as the main instrument in therapy) together with the reflection on the internal environment (subjective) and the external environment (objective).

One of the future psychotherapist’s greatest fears is not having patients, the reason being that “people are not prepared for psychotherapy”. The solving of this problem is an increase of self-esteem in the trainee. Colleagues that have started their own individual practices of psychology are encouraged to start courses for short periods of time, weekly with the implication of parents, the implication in voluntary activities, participation in

national psychology conferences and the elaboration of papers. In the same manner, all colleagues are encouraged to attend weekly meetings in psychological offices head by them, in which they can talk about different themes selected from their work field.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Satisfactions are greater for the trainer, the supervisor and the trainee or the becoming psychotherapist at the end of the training programme. Regardless all this not all colleagues will practice psychotherapy. Some of them will give up after the first modules of training and others continue their training and supervision in psychotherapy for a personal development and most of them have two jobs. Little of them will make a career in psychotherapy. Remaining a psychotherapist supposes being at an intersection between theory, practice and research. A psychotherapist is treated with respect and he is permanently preoccupied with interviews, supervision and maintaining a state of mental hygiene. An association of professional development in psychotherapy may easily gain room on the “market”, but it can lose it in the same easy manner. Trainers have a great responsibility in the training and the becoming of psychotherapist, and the trainees represents the mirror of development, maintaining and recognizing the supplier of professional development.

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