

Professional Mental Health Organisations Evade Requests for Evidence of 'Harm' Caused by Therapy Aimed at Reducing Gay Feelings

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The UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) has again declined to provide scientific evidence for its claim that therapeutic support to reduce unwanted same-sex feelings is harmful. According to its Chief Executive David Pink in a letter on 12 May 2015ⁱ to Core Issues Trust Council of Reference member Dermot O'Callaghan, "it is not my job to assist you in your exploration of scientific literature". Mr Pink has now been asked once again to address the question he has ignored.ⁱⁱ *

Rather than provide such evidence, Mr Pink relied on the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)ⁱⁱⁱ signed by fourteen of the national professional bodies, including UKCP and NHS England, which supports the 'ethical stance' that so called 'Conversion Therapy' is harmful.

Close reading of the Memorandum (para 2) reveals its starting assumption: "The MoU is informed by a position that efforts to try and change or alter sexual orientation through psychological therapies are unethical and potentially harmful". In other words, the MoU assumes the position that is being questioned. But the question remains: where is the evidence?

The MoU references the most detailed systematic review in the field, the report of the APA Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation (2009). But that report says, "recent SOCE (sexual orientation change efforts) research cannot provide conclusions regarding efficacy or safety" (p.3) and "None of the recent research...meets methodological standards that permit conclusions regarding efficacy or safety" (p.2)

So the APA review actually denies the UKCP statement^{iv} that there is "overwhelming evidence that undergoing such therapy is at considerable emotional and psychological cost." Since the APA could not find such evidence, the burden of proof now falls squarely on the UKCP to identify the evidence that the APA missed. The UKCP has yet to respond.

In related correspondence this month from the Professional Standards Authority (PSA)^v, which will not accredit any register which allows therapeutic practices supporting autonomous individuals to change, the PSA's CEO Harry Cayton has dismissed a call for an even-handed approach to the Public Sector Equality Duty, mindful of those with unwanted same-sex attractions who seek professional help. Mr Cayton dismisses the PSA's responsibility to support rights of ex-gays on the grounds that being gay or lesbian is a protected characteristic under the equality act, while being 'ex-gay' or having unwanted homosexual feelings is not. This is despite a High Court Ruling in 2013 which stated that according to the Equality Act of 2010 it is unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of sexual orientation, whether actual or perceived, and irrespective of what the original orientation was. This means that those who are 'ex-gay' should not be discriminated against – regardless of the fact that such an identity is not a protected category.^{vi}

This blatant refusal by the national mental health bodies, led by the UKCP, Royal College of Psychiatrists and their reviewer (the PSA) to base public policy and practice guidelines on objective available scientific evidence is a disturbing example of how these authorities are now being led not by good science but by 'gay science'. Their claim to be 'evidence-based' is seen to be vacuous.

* It has been announced without explanation that as at 3rd June 2015 Mr Pink has resigned from his post with UKCP "to pursue other opportunities". The concerns set out above remain unchanged.

For further information

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ⁱ <http://www.core-issues.org/uploads/UKCP%20from%20David%20Pink%20to%20Dermot%20O'Callaghan.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.core-issues.org/uploads/Letter%20to%20UKCP%20from%20COC%2027th%20May%202015.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ http://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/UKCP_Documents/policy/MoU-conversiontherapy.pdf

^{iv} http://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/UKCP_Documents/standards_and_guidance/40_Final_Reparative_Therapy_Paper_28022011_sf.rtf

^v <http://www.core-issues.org/uploads/150601%20Letter%20to%20Dr%20Michael%20Davidson.pdf>

^{vi} Paragraph 98 Case No: C1/2013/0993 & (A) The Queen on Application of Core Issues trust and Transport for London and Secretary of State for Culture Media, Sport and Minister of Women and Equalities <http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWCA/Civ/2014/34.html>