

Understanding Clinical Roles and Responsibilities

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Introduction

Children and adults with autism and social, emotional and mental health needs may require additional specialist support.

This support can be provided by a Clinical Team who aim to help individuals identify and work towards their personal goals and aspirations.

Clinicians may vary across different services but can include: Clinical Psychologists, Educational Psychologists, Forensic Psychologists, Assistant Psychologists, Psychiatrists, Psychotherapists, Occupational Therapists and Speech and Language Therapists.

This help sheet will detail the roles and responsibilities of each of these clinicians and how they can support individuals' needs.

Clinical Roles

Clinical Psychologists

Clinical Psychologists support individuals with a wide range of mental health and behavioural needs. They undertake psychological assessments in order to create

a formulation which is used to promote understanding of an individual's needs.

They use a variety of assessments including psychometric assessments, interviews, direct observation of behaviour and behavioural recording in order to gather information.

Clinical Psychologists are trained in a wide variety of therapeutic models and as such are able to draw on a range of approaches to ensure the most appropriate intervention is implemented. Some of their recommendations may include signposting, psycho-education, group work, recommending changes to staff practice and one-to-one work.

Training and qualifications:

Typically a Clinical Psychologist will have obtained a British Psychological Society (BPS) accredited undergraduate degree in psychology often also completing a Masters degree in applied psychology. After gaining further experience working in relevant healthcare settings, Clinical Psychologists then embark on a three year Clinical Doctorate Training Programme. During this time they work with individuals that need the relevant support under the supervision of experienced psychologists alongside a period of academic study.

They are trained to work in health care settings using a variety of models of psychological therapy and to work consultatively within health care organisations. They also develop skills in research methods and service development.

Educational Psychologists

Educational psychology is concerned with children and young people in educational and early year's settings. Educational Psychologists support children and young people facing challenges such as learning difficulties, social and emotional problems, issues around disability as well as more complex developmental disorders. They work in a variety of ways including observations, interviews and assessments and offer consultation, advice and support to teachers, parents, the wider community as well as the young people concerned. They research innovative ways of helping vulnerable young people and often train teachers, learning support assistants as well as others working with children.

Training and qualifications:

Many Educational Psychologists will have initially trained as teachers and so come to the role with a comprehensive understanding of educational settings. They will then complete a "conversion" course to achieve a BPS accreditation. Others will have completed an undergraduate degree in psychology. In order to qualify as an Educational Psychologist they will complete a doctorate or Masters in Educational Psychology.

Forensic Psychologists

The role of the Forensic Psychologist involves the assessment of the risk that an individual poses to themselves and/or to others around them. This may include criminal behaviours, sexualised behaviours, sexual exploitation, violence and self-harm. Forensic Psychologists use prevention techniques and interventions in order to avoid potential risk behaviours.

Training and qualifications:

A Forensic Psychologist will have obtained a BPS accredited undergraduate degree in psychology before specialising in their chosen field of forensics. They will then complete a Masters in Forensic Psychology.

Stage 2 of the BPS Qualification in Forensic Psychology involves a minimum of two years of supervised practice, where the clinician will be expected to provide evidence of applying psychology in forensic settings. Many will complete this stage whilst working as a trainee Forensic Psychologist.

Assistant Psychologists

The exact role of the Assistant Psychologist will depend on the needs of the service. Typically they will provide clinical support under the direct supervision of a qualified Psychologist who retains clinical responsibility for their practice.

The work of an Assistant Psychologist typically includes carrying out assessments, report writing, observations, updating databases, one-to-one or group interventions, research and audit.

Training and qualifications:

Assistant Psychologists have completed an undergraduate degree in Psychology. Often they will have or will be working towards a Masters degree. They work under the supervision of a qualified Clinical Psychologist in a learning role to gather the necessary skills to embark on clinical training.

Psychiatrists

Psychiatrists assess a person's state of mind using the "biopsychosocial" model of understanding. This emphasizes the importance of a person's past experiences, family, culture and surroundings as well as any medical features.

They have the skills to diagnose mental health conditions and will typically offer medication as a means of support.

Training and qualifications:

A psychiatrist is a medically-qualified practitioner who will have spent five to six years training to be a doctor. Once qualified they will have worked as a doctor in general medicine and surgery for at least one year. Following this they will then embark on further training in helping people with psychological needs.

Psychotherapists

Psychotherapists work with individuals, couples, families and groups to help them overcome a range of psychological and emotional issues. Psychotherapists use personal treatment plans and a variety of non-medical-based treatments to:

- Address the individual's thought processes, feelings and behaviour,
- Understand inner conflicts,
- Find new ways to deal with and alleviate distress.

Psychotherapy usually involves talking, but other methods may be used for example play, art, music, drama and movement.



Training and qualifications:

Psychotherapists are qualified professionals who are registered with the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) or the United Kingdom Council of Psychotherapy (UKCP) to ensure they are able to provide safe, expert therapy. Routes into the profession may vary and as such provides the profession with a broad range of experienced clinicians.

Occupational Therapists

Occupational Therapists help people of all ages with physical, mental or social disabilities to independently carry out everyday tasks or jobs with more independence and confidence. An Occupational Therapist may develop an individualised treatment programme and may introduce equipment that will aid the person they are supporting in their activities. Interventions are reviewed periodically in order to evaluate its progress and make changes where needed.

Occupational therapy provides practical support to empower people to facilitate recovery and overcome barriers preventing them from completing the activities (or occupations) that matter to them. This support increases people's independence and satisfaction in all aspects of life.

Training and qualifications:

To practise as an Occupational Therapist, clinicians must be registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). To register with the HCPC, you first need to successfully complete an approved degree in Occupational Therapy. This is usually a BSc (Hons) course which takes three to four years to complete full-time.

Speech and Language Therapists

Speech and Language Therapists (SaLT) assess and treat babies, children and adults who have various levels of speech, language and communication problems, or difficulties in swallowing, drinking or eating. They work with a range of people, including people with physical and learning disabilities, hearing loss/deafness, psychiatric disorders or dementia, and could treat a range of conditions, including cleft palate, stammering, language delay and voice disorders.

Training and qualifications:

To practise as a Speech and Language Therapist, clinicians must be registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) and successfully complete an approved degree, which takes three to four years.

Conclusion

The individuals we support at Options Autism are complex; this means that they often require additional specialist support outside the range of generic residential services.

Our committed and skilled clinicians work as part of a multidisciplinary team to ensure they are able to provide a wide variety of specialist support. Having the breadth of experience and knowledge across the organisation ensures that we can be responsive to individual needs in a timely manner.

Our embedded clinical teams have skill sets tailored to the needs of each service, therefore the combination of clinicians that make up the clinical team may vary across individual services but could include any detailed within this help sheet.

Resources

- The British Psychological Society - www.bps.org.uk
- The Royal College of Psychiatry - www.rcpsych.ac.uk
- The Royal College of Occupational Therapy - www.rcot.co.uk
- The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapy - www.rcslt.org
- The British Association for Counselling- www.bacp.co.uk
- The Health and Care Professions Council - www.hcpc-uk.co.uk
- The General Medical Council - www.gmc-uk.org

Spread the word...

If you found this help sheet useful please feel free to share it with anyone who you feel may benefit.

Our help sheets are produced monthly and written by our clinical team. If you would like us to cover any particular subjects around autism in future editions then please let us know by emailing info@optionsautism.co.uk

The complete series of help sheets can be found on our website www.optionsautism.co.uk/resources