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Preface

The British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy's definition of counselling is *"Counselling and psychotherapy are umbrella terms that cover a range of talking therapies. They are delivered by trained practitioners who work with people over a short or long term to help them bring about effective change or enhance their wellbeing."* (BACP 2018)

Millions of people have experienced the benefits of counselling in the UK alone. Counselling is a specific mental health discipline that includes aspects of guidance and psychotherapy (Erford, 2018). It focuses on a wellness model aimed at improving the quality of life and involves both the counsellor and client in collaboration.

Counselling is a talking therapy that involves a trained therapist listening to you and helping you find ways to deal with emotional issues. Sometimes the term "counselling" is used to refer to talking therapies in general, but counselling is also a type of therapy in its own right. The counselling which takes place at Personal care services follows both the modalities of Person centred and Cognitive behavioural therapy.

Person centred counselling as the name suggests, follows the person-centred modality which puts the client first. It helps the client to achieve self-actualisation, the person-centred therapist will offer:

- **unconditional positive regard (UPR)** – accepting and valuing you
- **congruence** - being honest and transparent in how they experience you and your world
- **empathic understanding** – seeing your viewpoint as if they were you

When attending counselling sessions with a person-centred counsellor, the client is encouraged to bring their own issues to the session – the counselling is led by the client and not directed by the counsellor.

Many clients, with no prior knowledge of counselling, believe that the counsellor will sort their problems out for them. A person-centred counsellor will help the client to

explore their own issues, feelings, beliefs, behaviour, and worldview, so you they can become more self-aware and achieve greater independence.

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is a type of therapy that looks at a client's thoughts, feelings and behaviours and helps to change some of these to manage your problems.

A key part of this is identifying the negative thinking patterns that the client may feel trapped in, helping them to break free from these and to feel better.

CBT focuses on equipping the client with the tools to address current problems in their life and relieve the symptoms they're facing, before making links to their past and how their beliefs started. The counsellor at Personal Care Services is trained and qualified in both modalities and uses an assessment prior to the commencement of therapy in order to gauge an understanding of the clients presenting issue and how which modality or a combination of both modalities will support the client with their presenting issue.

Personal Care Services (PCS)

PCS Ltd is a Domiciliary & Palliative care provider based in West Lancashire, providing dedicated, high quality and affordable care services throughout the North West of England. In 2016, PCS Ltd were awarded a position on the Ethical Providers Framework of 2017 for Wigan Council. PCS Ltd now stand as part of Wigan Borough's elite 11, providing the highest standard of care and support to the full Wigan Borough. The company was founded in 2013 by experienced professionals Nigel Fielding and Nicola Connolly. Nicola and Nigel are dedicated to the care of both their service users and staff. They are an innovative company who believe in the highest quality of standards for all and ensure that the mental health and wellbeing of both their staff and service users is a priority. PCS Ltd is a leading company in terms of providing mental health and wellbeing support to their service users and staff. The PCS counselling service was born from the innovative idea of Nicola who strives to deliver a service which each and every employee and service user can access to help and support their mental health and wellbeing in a positive, safe and caring environment.

In 2021 the Counselling service was opened up to service users and their families and this was met with adulation. The service since this time has continued to grow and the numbers of service users and staff accessing the service has continued to grow with positive outcomes.

Summary

This publication provides the most up to date and detailed picture available of the individuals who have used the PCS counselling services from May 2022 – April 2023. The PCS Counselling service started in May 2020 and has grown in terms of numbers and efficacy.

The PCS counselling service uses integrative talking therapies which are directed by the client. All staff that are employed by PCS can access the service via text message, telephone call or e-mail, more recently video link has also been offered. The service is accessible via referral or self-referral. Referrals generally are made through the office staff and self-referrals by the staff themselves. The service is free for any employee and the length of talking therapy is directed by the client with support of the therapist. Since November 2021, the service has been opened up to allow service users the opportunity to also access the service.

The service provides mental health advice, information and support to any staff member of PCS and service users. The service provides a safe, confidential space for staff as well as service users to discuss issues that maybe affecting them both in and outside of the working environment.

The service offers psycho-educational tools, support and information to clients to enable them to effectively manage their presenting issues.

Introduction

2022 has been another successful year of the PCS counselling service running, with numbers increasing and overall gratitude of the service by those using it. The success of the service is apparent in both the number of staff and service users utilising the service and the self-referrals that are occurring. This report highlights the provision of the PCS counselling service from May 2022 to April 2023. The PCS counselling service was set up and initiated in May 2020, at the height of the Coronavirus pandemic. Directors at PCS decided that a counselling service would support the declining mental health of staff through the uncertainty of the pandemic. Staff at the time were anxious regarding the rise in deaths in both care home residents and community placed service users. The picture has not changed in terms of the uncertainty of staff and whilst the coronavirus still appears to be a highlighting factor in terms of staff mental health and wellbeing, the uncertainty in terms of the cost of living is now an even bigger crisis for staff. Whilst PCS took every opportunity to provide the necessary intervention to support employees on the front line in terms of providing Personal and Protective Equipment (PPE) within the coronavirus pandemic. It has been difficult to see the impact that the cost of living crisis is having on their staff and are doing everything that they possibly can in order to support them.

With staff sickness due to declining mental health on the increase, the directors decided that intervention to support employees was necessary to a healthy staff team for both the employees of the company and the service users. The counselling service remains a positive service for staff and feedback has been very good, enabling individuals a safe space to discuss issues relating to them. Whilst the coronavirus pandemic is still the main attributing factor to mental health issues, the emergence of the cost of living crisis is a secondary factor to staff wellbeing. The main impact of both these contributing factors at present is still staff sickness absence. PCS is very proactive in supporting both service users and staff highlighting the service to improve staff wellbeing.

Why is counselling important in care?

- A Cochrane review of counselling in care concluded:
 - Counselling is associated with significantly greater clinical effectiveness in short-term mental health outcomes compared to usual GP care in the UK.
 - Participants were satisfied with counselling overall after engaging in therapy.
 - Counselling provided support to individuals as well as tools to enable them to cope in certain situations.
 - Counselling is beneficial to enable a positive work environment and allows employees to feel supported in their everyday working lives.

Mental Health

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood. PCS have recognised that the mental wellbeing of their staff is really important to them. They recognise that a mentally healthy workforce is productive and ensures that the best care is given to their service users. PCS have also recognised and identified this year that the effects of long-term health issues and palliative care issues have had an impact on service user's mental health and they have highlighted that the counselling service would be beneficial to service user's mental health and wellbeing.

The Counselling Service

The counselling service is run by a qualified counsellor which holds the Foundation degree in counselling and psychotherapy. The counsellor is a member of the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) and adheres to the ethical framework. The counsellor is also a specialist therapist within Cognitive Behaviour Therapy and holds a Level 5 qualification in this modality.

Any employee of PCS as well as service users can freely self-refer to the service or be referred by the company. The service is discussed at reviews with staff where they highlight stress, anxiety or other factors which are affecting both their home and work lives. The service is completely confidential and is directed by the client. Whilst the service is predominantly person centred, the use of psycho educational tools enables clients to gain knowledge and support to deal effectively with their presenting issue and gives them the tools in order to deal with the issues should they face them again in the future.

When a client has been referred to the service, they are asked to complete a short form which is sent directly to them via e-mail or text message, to highlight why they have been referred to the service. This form also describes the purpose of the service and highlights confidentiality as well as the triple harm clause which includes when confidentiality may be broken in terms of safeguarding. Clients are asked to sign this prior to commencement of talking therapy.

The counselling service runs at a time and day which is convenient for the client or service user. There is also a drop-in clinic which runs on a Tuesday evening weekly 5pm – 8pm. Again, this is a confidential service and staff are encouraged to use the service if they feel that they would benefit from it.

A wellbeing assessment was sent to each staff member in March 2023, based on the Edinburgh mental health scale to assess the mental wellbeing of staff and to provide support where necessary. This will be actioned annually to support the mental health and wellbeing of all staff.

Blogs

The monthly blogs provide information to employees of PCS around a range of issues which relate to mental health. The blogs focused on coronavirus throughout the pandemic and the negative 'scare mongering' providing factual information to provide more of a positive focus on the pandemic rather than the negative which social media heightened. Later blogs have highlighted evidence-based information on anxiety as well as depression and other common mental health issues as well as mindfulness techniques to help and support the stresses of everyday life. The most

recent blog has been regarding 'perimenopause'. With over two thirds of PCS workforce being women, and the recent information highlighted in the media regarding this very pertinent issue. It was important to the director of PCS to highlight the concerns as well as symptoms of perimenopause. Nicola Connolly is an advocate for this and would like to highlight the support that her staff can gain as an employee at PCS especially in relation to perimenopausal and menopausal symptoms. A number of clients have already accessed the service due to perimenopause and menopausal symptoms and they wanted to provide not only factual information to staff, but support from the service for the symptoms that they were presenting with. The blogs have been very well received by staff and provide factual, evidence-based information. Staff have also been asked in the PCS newsletter what they would like to see in the blogs and a consequence of this has highlighted the need for a staff voice, Staff voice was initiated in 2021 and is now available on the staff portal on the PCS website, it continues to gain the voice of all staff and is instrumental in allowing change where it has been identified as a need moving forward.

Perimenopause and Menopause

Perimenopause (also referred to as the menopause transition) is when a woman's body starts transitioning to menopause. During this transition, the ovaries begin producing less hormones, causing the menstrual cycle to become erratic or irregular. At this time, the body is moving toward the end of the reproductive years. Perimenopause may begin as early as mid-30s or as late as mid-50s. Some people are in perimenopause for only a short time. But for many, it lasts four to eight years. The term perimenopause simply describes the time when the menstrual cycles are no longer predictable.

Other physical changes and symptoms can occur as the body adjusts to different hormone levels. During perimenopause, a woman's fertility is declining, but they still can become pregnant. The symptoms of perimenopause, the age it starts and how long it lasts will vary between women. A woman is considered to out of perimenopause and into menopause once they have had 12 consecutive months

without a menstrual period. Perimenopause begins about eight to 10 years before menopause. It usually starts in your mid-40s, but it can start earlier. Menopause is when your periods stop due to lower hormone levels. This usually happens between the ages of 45 and 55. It can sometimes happen earlier naturally. Or for reasons such as surgery to remove the ovaries (oophorectomy) or the uterus (hysterectomy), cancer treatments like chemotherapy, or a genetic reason. Sometimes the reason is unknown. Menopause and perimenopause cause symptoms such as anxiety, mood swings, brain fog, hot flushes and irregular periods. These symptoms can start years before your periods stop and carry on afterwards (NHS 2023). There is help and support from the counselling service with issues relating to both perimenopause and menopause. PCS have made a menopause workplace pledge. The Menopause Workplace Pledge is taking positive action to make sure everyone going through the menopause is supported. Nicola as stated is an advocate of this and the counselling service aims to be a beacon for those directly affected by both perimenopause and menopause.

Statistics regarding the counselling service

Since the introduction of the PCS counselling service in May 2020, 56 individuals have accessed the counselling service.

On average the clients have stayed with the service for 7 months with 12. Out of the 56 individuals since inception of the clients staying long term with issues that they have presented with. In terms of long-term duration, this equates to a period of 12 months or longer. At present 4 individuals are still being seen by the counsellor and they have been with the service for more than the 12-month period.

Anxiety and depression appear to be the main presenting mental health issues and CBT is the intervention which is used commonly to support the clients. This talking therapy appears to be favoured as it deals with the present time and with clients presenting with anxiety, it gives them tools in order to use to help and support with the symptoms of the anxiety. Psycho-educational tools have been used with clients, along with breathing techniques to deal with the presenting issue as well the anxiety that the client is experiencing. The breathing techniques are different for each client

and 100% of clients have said that in the first instance these techniques have been effective for the anxiety experienced.

A number of the clients presenting with anxiety have highlighted that they have been on sickness absence due to the symptoms of the anxiety and have returned to work quickly following CBT intervention.

Long term sickness has been due to a number of issues, however the talking therapies that the clients have received have helped to encourage them back to work feeling both supported and happier. The drop-in clinic runs on a Tuesday evening 5pm-8pm and has had a total of 6 staff members access over the period May 2020 to date. Self-referrals have increased with 6 staff self-referring since May 2020, generally self-referrals have been received via e-mail. There is an increase in referrals to the service at present, with stress and anxiety being the main contributing factor, this has been directly attributed to the cost of living crisis. Perimenopause as well as personal issues and financial issues are the underlying cause for concern. 80% of staff at present have highlighted issues relating to the cost of living crisis and the fear that they have at present with the increase in fuel, National Insurance contributions as well as usage of local food banks, being the main topic of conversation. It is felt that this issue may increase in clients in the future.

Other issues that clients have presented with in high numbers is relationship issues as well as bereavement issues and perimenopausal issues. These are topics that have also been highlighted in the staff voice and are issues that are being discussed at present. As stated previously PCS has also signed up to the workplace menopause scheme, aimed at supporting those individuals who are suffering from the symptoms of both perimenopause and menopause and they have made a pledge to directly support all staff.

Feedback from the clients who are receiving counselling or who have completed counselling on the whole has been extremely positive.

Clients have highlighted how they have felt supported due to the service.

Feedback from the evaluation of the service state; *"Having this PCS counselling service has been so beneficial for me as there has been days when I have felt alone and just to have someone to help you or even just listen to you has been helping me*

so much especially when we was in covid as a carer we look after others but sometimes we wonder who looks after us and Jaime has been amazing for me and my mental health”

A service user has also added, “Having someone to talk to who is understanding and projects empathy was a first for me. I always felt I was strong willed but having someone like your counsellor is so helpful she gives me something to look forward to. I had so many negative emotions she helped me so much. I hate to think where I would be now”

100% of clients who completed the evaluation form which was sent out on completion of their counselling stated that it was a five-star service and that they would recommend the service to a friend or colleague. 100% of the clients also stated that the service has been of benefit to them and that their mental health and wellbeing has improved as a consequence.

At present the service has 7 active clients including service users. It is hoped that the service continues to grow in strength and provide a positive and influential service to both employees and service users of PCS to support their everyday and long-term mental health needs.

Conclusion

The PCS Counselling Service has been running now since May 2020. A total of 36 months. There has been a total of 56 clients that the service has supported throughout that time and it is hoped that it will support many more in the future months ahead. It is felt that the service will grow in terms of client numbers over the coming months, particularly in relation to the increase in terms of the cost of living as this appears to be the main topic discussed at present by clients that are being referred to the service amongst other issues. Cognitive Behavioural therapy appears to be the therapy of choice as it gives the client useful tools to initiate when anxiety is heightened and also gives them tools to deal with the presenting issues of anxiety in the first instance. Clients highlight that they are happy with the service and thank PCS for its introduction as they highlight the need for such services within the care industry particularly at this difficult time. It has to be noted at this point that no other

care organisation within the area has a counselling service which is free for all staff to access and this service is providing a very much needed addition to the mental health of extremely important employees in care. PCS have been not only innovative in the creation of this service for their staff and service users, they have identified that their staff's mental health and wellbeing is important to the care of their service users.

Recommendations for the future

It is hoped that the PCS Counselling service grows in strength throughout the future and directors are in talks presently with the counsellor to see how the service can reach more employees, service users as well as families. The Care Act 2014 was introduced to incorporate a voice in care for the service users and their carers and this is a vision that PCS hold. They would like to offer talking therapies and counselling services to everyone that is under the banner of PCS to ensure that everyone's mental wellbeing is being taken into consideration and that they are being supported appropriately as well as ethically. It is difficult for carers of those who have long term conditions or are in end of life care. Waiting lists for talking changes and other therapies are long and can create more of a decline in mental health, therefore PCS's vision for the future is to acknowledge that and put measures in place to prevent that for all of the PCS community. Staff are working hard in difficult situations and if this service can help to provide a haven for them, it has done what PCS directors Nicola and Nigel set out to do from the start.

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