

## **Core Competencies**

### **Clinical Division of Psychotherapy**

The Hong Kong College of Psychiatrists

Date: 28<sup>th</sup> May, 2011

## Working Group on Core Competency:

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**Objective 1 – To assess mental health problems from a psychotherapeutic perspective**

<b>Knowledge</b>	<b>Skills</b>	<b>Attitudes demonstrated through behaviors</b>
<b>Knowledge and understanding of mental health problems</b>	<p>An ability to draw on knowledge of the factors associated with the development and maintenance of mental health problems</p> <p>An ability to draw on knowledge of the ways in which mental health problems can impact on functioning (e.g. maintaining intimate, family and social relationships, or the capacity to maintain employment and study)</p> <p>An ability to draw on knowledge of the impact of impairments in functioning on mental health</p> <p>An ability to draw on knowledge of mental health problems to avoid escalating or compounding the patient's condition when their behavior leads to interpersonal difficulties which are directly attributable to their mental health problem</p>	

<b>Knowledge of a generic assessment</b>	Ability to undertake a generic assessment and make formulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- to elicit information regarding psychological problems, diagnosis, past history, present life situation, attitude about and motivation for therapy</li><li>- to gain an overview of the patient's current life situation, specific stressors and social support</li><li>- to assess the patient's coping mechanisms, stress tolerance, and level of functioning</li><li>- to help the patient identify/select target symptoms or problems, and to identify which are the most distressing and which the most amenable to intervention</li><li>- to assess and act on indicators of risk (of harm to self or others) (and the ability to know when to seek advice from others)</li><li>- to gauge the extent to which the patients can think about themselves psychologically and their motivation for a psychological intervention</li><li>- to discuss treatment options with the patients, making sure that they are aware of the options available to them, and helping them consider which of these options they wish to follow</li></ul>
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**Objective 2 – To operate within professional and ethical principles**

Knowledge	Skills	Attitudes demonstrated through behaviors
<p><b>Knowledge of, and ability to operate within, professional and ethical guidelines</b></p>	<p>An ability to draw on knowledge of relevant codes of professional and ethical conduct and practice in order to apply the general principles embodied in these codes to each piece of work being undertaken</p>	<p>obtaining informed consent for interventions from patients;</p> <p>maintaining confidentiality, and knowing the conditions under which confidentiality can be breached;</p> <p>competence to practice, and maintaining competent practice through appropriate training/professional development;</p> <p>maintaining appropriate standards of personal conduct for self:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a capacity to recognize any potential problems in relation to power and “dual relationships” with patients, and to desist absolutely from any abuses in these areas</li> <li>- recognizing when personal impairment could influence fitness to practice, and taking appropriate action (e.g. seeking personal and professional support and/or desisting from practice)</li> </ul>

**Objective 3 – To develop the ability to engage patient in therapy**

<b>Knowledge</b>	<b>Skills</b>	<b>Attitudes demonstrated through behaviors</b>
<b>Knowledge of the importance of engaging a patient in therapy</b>	While maintaining professional boundaries, an ability to show appropriate levels of warmth, concern, confidence and genuineness, matched to the patient's needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- to engender trust</li><li>- to develop rapport</li><li>- to adapt personal style so that it meshes with that of the patient</li><li>- to recognize the importance of discussion and expression of patient's emotional reactions</li><li>- to adjust the level of in-session activity and structuring of the session to the patient's needs</li><li>- to convey an appropriate level of confidence and competence</li><li>- to avoid negative interpersonal behaviors (such as impatience, aloofness or insincerity)</li></ul>

**Objective 4 – To understand the concept of therapeutic alliance and be able to develop and maintain it**

Knowledge	Skills	Attitudes demonstrated through behaviours
<p><b>Understanding the concept of the therapeutic alliance</b></p>	<p>An ability to draw on knowledge that the therapeutic alliance is usually seen as having three components:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. the relationship or bond between therapist and patient</li> <li>2. consensus between therapist and patient regarding the techniques/methods employed in the therapy</li> <li>3. consensus between therapist and patient regarding the goals of therapy</li> </ol> <p>An ability to draw on knowledge that all three components contribute to the maintenance of the alliance</p>	
<p><b>Knowledge of therapist factors associated with the alliance</b></p>	<p>An ability to draw on knowledge of therapist factors which increase the probability of forming a positive alliance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- being flexible and allowing patients to discuss issues which are important to them</li> <li>- being respectful</li> <li>- being warm, friendly and affirming</li> <li>- being open</li> </ul>

	<p>Capacity to develop the alliance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- being alert and active</li> <li>- being able to show honesty through self-reflection</li> <li>- being trustworthy</li> <li>- to listen to the patient's concerns in a manner which is nonjudgmental, supportive and sensitive, and which conveys a comfortable attitude when the patients describes their experience</li> <li>- to ensure that the patient is clear about the rationale for the intervention being offered</li> <li>- to help the patients express any concerns or doubts they have about the therapy and/or the therapist, especially where this relates to mistrust or skepticism</li> <li>- to help the patients articulate their goals for the therapy, and to gauge the degree of congruence in the aims of the patients and therapist</li> </ul>
	<p>Capacity to maintain the alliance</p> <p>Capacity to recognize and to address threats to the therapeutic alliance ("alliance ruptures")</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- An ability to deploy appropriate interventions in response to disagreements about tasks and goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- to check that the patient is clear about the rationale for treatment and to review this with them and/or clarify any misunderstandings</li> <li>- to help patients understand the rationale for</li> </ul>

	<p>-An ability to deploy appropriate interventions in response to strains in the bond between therapist and patient</p>	<p>treatment through using/drawing attention to concrete examples in the session</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- to judge when it is best to refocus on tasks and goals which are seen as relevant or manageable by the patient (rather than explore factors which are giving rise to disagreement over these factors)</li><li>- to give and ask for feedback about what is happening in the here-and-now interaction, in a manner which invites exploration with the patient</li><li>- to acknowledge and accept their responsibility for their contribution to any strains in the alliance</li><li>- Where the patient recognizes and acknowledges that the alliance is under strain, to help the patient make links between the rupture and their usual style of relating to others</li><li>- to allow the patients to assert any negative feelings about the relationship between the therapist and themselves</li><li>- to help the patients explore any fears they have about expressing negative feelings about the relationship between the therapist and themselves</li></ul>
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**Objective 5 – To acquire the skills to deal with the emotional contents of session**

<b>Knowledge</b>	<b>Skills</b>	<b>Attitudes demonstrated through behaviors</b>
<b>Knowledge of the importance to deal with emotional contents of session</b>	<p>An ability to facilitate the processing of emotions by the patient – to acknowledge and contain emotional levels that are too high (e.g. anger, fear, despair) or too low (e.g. apathy, low motivation)</p> <p>An ability to deal effectively with emotional issues that interfere with effective change (e.g. hostility, anxiety, excessive anger, avoidance of strong affect).</p>	



	An ability to draw on knowledge of the principles which underlie the intervention being applied, using this to inform the application of the specific techniques which characterize the model	
	An ability to draw on knowledge of the principles of the intervention model in order to implement therapy in a manner which is flexible and responsive to patients' need, but which also ensures that all relevant components are included	

**Objective 7 – To develop the capacity to manage termination**

<b>Knowledge</b>	<b>Skills</b>	<b>Attitudes demonstrated through behaviours</b>
<b>Knowledge of the meaning of termination in therapy and the importance of managing it</b>	<p>An ability to signal the ending of the intervention at appropriate points during the therapy (e.g. when agreeing the treatment contract, and especially as the intervention draws to close) in a way which acknowledges the potential importance of this transition for the patient</p> <p>An ability to help patients discuss their feelings and thoughts about endings and any anxieties about managing alone</p> <p>An ability to review the work undertaken together</p> <p>An ability to say goodbye</p>	



