

Providing Services for People with a Personality Disorder and or Complex Needs through a Social Therapy Framework

Introduction

The founders of the Ansel Group take the view that the central issues for people with personality disorder and complex needs are the nature and effectiveness of their relationships and interactions with other people. We believe these challenges are significantly influenced by chaotic, abusive and neglectful experiences during personality development.

In response to this the primary role of all staff, and particularly so the direct-care staff, in Ansel is to provide and maintain a Social Therapy approach for all our patients.

What is Social Therapy?

In the UK, Social Therapy has largely been associated with Therapeutic Communities and the idea of the community, rather than the staff team, providing the therapeutic direction. This is particularly the case in Democratic Therapeutic Communities (DTC's) which have a client/ patient led structure supporting a community approach towards that direction and decision making.

In the case of Ansel we have taken our lead from the Dutch concept of Social Therapy, with a particular emphasis on the TBS (*Terbeschikkingstelling*) system. Social Therapy in this context, whilst still patient centric, is considerably more directed and managed and can be best described as a service delivery system or operational framework rather than a more traditionally considered and targeted therapy. It enables an organisation to take a whole systems approach, including consideration of its clinical and non-clinical activities, to facilitate the incorporation of therapeutic ideas into as many aspects of the patient (and staff) life as possible, in both formal and informal settings.

The physical operational environment, not just the clinical area but the whole building, should be seen as an instrument to support that engagement, treatment and effective working practice. Shared office areas, communal facilities and clinical areas are considered a holistic environment designed to promote social interactions between staff and staff, patients and patients and patients and staff in a non-hierarchical way.

Thus the primary change agent is the inter-personal and social interaction between staff and patients in a physical environment configured to support this way of working.

Social Therapy demands a range of working practices centred on a team based approach which most other forms of patient management and treatments interventions do not. All staff must maintain a consistent approach to managing each patient according to their current Social Therapy formulation and CPA and changes in how we respond or work with an individual will only be agreed at one of the teams regular clinical meetings, collectively and through considered consultation.

Different models of psychological therapy can be readily incorporated into the Social Therapy framework including substance misuse programmes, offence focused programmes, DBT, CBT, SOTP, VOTP etc, depending on the assessed needs of the patient. These models will be delivered as a set of formal individual and group activities which emphasise interaction opportunities and provide an opportunity to facilitate them. However to achieve this we need to be able to develop an individualised formulation for each patient

What is a Formulation?

A formulation is a hypothesis or theory about why the person is behaving in the way they do. It should be based on what we know about the patient, so it is dynamic and changes over time, as we get to know the patient better and indeed as the patient gets to know us. The idea of developing a formulation helps us as a team to reach a consensus on how we move forward in helping, treating and supporting a patient consistently. It also helps us to think about our individual role within the team in delivering the formulation. Once a consensus team formulation is reached, all the team will work to that formulation. Responses to interventions based on the formulation will be reviewed regularly and adjusted as we become more informed of the patients needs.

How do we get started?

To start with many of the staff will have little or no knowledge of social therapy, other than what we offer in induction, this is why we provide an extended induction programme. This delivers a basic foundation of knowledge, understanding and skills. These new skills will require time for consolidation and learning through practice. Further skills, knowledge and confidence in practice will be delivered through a development programme, which places a great deal of emphasis on peer review, supervision and reflective practice. Initially most of the focus will be on developing good interpersonal skills, not just with the patients, but with each other. Our own induction and in-house training is further enhanced by our commitment that all our staff will complete the Knowledge and Understanding Framework through the Personality Disorder Institute of Nottingham University.

As we begin to develop more specialist skills then we can expand and consolidate our understanding and application of case formulation. However, in the short term, until the social therapy staff are up to speed then a heavy burden will fall on the psychologists and psychiatrists in the team, not only to carry out any specialist work but also in helping to train the rest of the team. This is why we place a strong emphasis on recruiting team members who are willing to enhance their professional expertise with a deeper understanding of the needs of people with a personality disorder.

Summary

Social Therapy requires the promotion of consistent, managed interactions between staff and patients based on and informed by an agreed formulation of the patients needs. These interactions use both the social and physical environment to support the patients development towards an effective and sustainable reduction in risk and a greater level of independence.



Ansel is the only nationally available, independent healthcare organisation solely dedicated to providing an integrated service pathway for people with personality disorders who may have additional complex needs and have challenged other service provision.

For further information please contact:

www.anselgroup.co.uk or our Nottingham low secure male personality disorder service on 0845 200 2020