ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING EFFECTIVE CLINICAL SUPERVISION

Clinical supervision should have a goal of developing and maintaining professional competency, while safeguarding client care. The process should be seen as facilitating the application of knowledge and skills, professional conduct and ethics and professional identity. It should also be evaluative and goal directed. A number of methods can be used in supervision including instruction, modelling, direct observation or specific interventions.

An essential first step is identifying your learning needs in relation to working with clients with an eating disorder. There may be a range of different knowledge and skill areas that you would like to develop in order to feel confident and competent in the work that you do. It is important to reflect on your knowledge, skills and feelings on an ongoing basis. Try to identify areas where you feel you are doing well and areas that you would like to improve. Some examples may include counseling skills, therapeutic approach, knowledge of clinical aspects or exploring your own emotional reactions towards clients. Identifying key learning goals can guide your professional development in this area.

After you have identified your key learning goals, the next important step is to think about how you can meet your goals and what you may need to help you. You can then think about how supervision may assist in meeting your learning needs and in developing the practical knowledge and skills required to carry out your work.

Once you have your learning plan in place, you can then think about who may be best to link in with for supervision. It is important to identify a clinician who has the knowledge, skills and practical experience that you could learn from and who you would feel comfortable working with in a clinical supervisory relationship. You can then talk with the clinician about their availability and willingness to be involved in a supervision arrangement. You may find that you require two supervisors working on different aspects (eg a dietitian might meet fortnightly with someone to assist in developing specific counseling skills and with a dietitian monthly to work on developing their role as a dietitian in managing clients with an eating disorder). You may also identify some learning strategies that do not need to be a focus of supervision and may be achieved by conducting literature searches or attending workshops or conferences.

In setting up supervision, it is important to take the time with your supervisor to discuss what you would like to achieve from supervision and how the supervisor can help you meet your learning goals. It is important to also talk about how supervision will work, including the frequency and length of supervision, whether this will be conducted face to face or via telephone or video conference, and the format the supervisor would like to use. Some supervisors for example might ask you to prepare a particular case for discussion, or bring examples of specific aspects of your work that you are aiming to develop. A supervision session can alternatively be a space for you to debrief about the difficulties that just came up in your last session.

It is important to note that reflection is a crucial part of ongoing supervision. This will involve identifying competency areas, reviewing knowledge and practice, and utilizing relevant knowledge aspects. Reflective practice is a means by which clinicians can develop a greater self-awareness about the nature and effectiveness of their clinical practice. Discussing your ongoing needs and how these can be met is an essential ongoing component of clinical supervision.