



The British Association
for the
Person-Centred Approach

Meeting with Shadow Health Minister- Anne Milton, MP

On 2 Nov 09, Teresa Cosgrove and I attended a meeting in the Grand Committee Room at Westminster Palace called by Anne Milton MP, who is Shadow Health Minister. After entering the building through some of the tightest security we have ever encountered we were surprised that there were only about 50 people there, probably representing about 20 organisations. We had heard rumours that only those pre-invited to speak would be able to address the meeting, but this was not so. Anne Milton proved to be a very effective Chair and generally seemed open to listening to a wide range of views.

The Shadow Minister said that she had called the meeting because she had been contacted by so many individuals and organisations, indeed no other subject had generated so much interest since she entered parliament (in 2005). Party politics aside, she was the first politician who had directly sought the views of our profession.

Following AM's introduction the first to speak was Marc Seale, Chief Executive and Registrar of HPC. He repeated the now familiar arguments that this was all about public protection. The HPC had obviously picked up the criticism that most counsellors & psychotherapists are opposed to the medical model and he claimed that the HPC's successful regulation of psychologists and drama therapists proved that this argument was invalid. He claimed that they were tasked by government to do a job and implied that they were no more than honest workers doing that job. Why, I wondered have they therefore commissioned a MORI poll to justify their arguments?

MIND have not previously be represented at Regulation meetings but they were there and very vocal saying that they were there to represent service users. Their line seemed to be that the HPC were wonderful and they joined with the HPC in implying that anyone who did not agree with them somehow did not have the best interests of clients at heart.

When Lynn Gabriel, Chair of BACP, spoke she placed her entire emphasis on the differentiation between counselling and psychotherapist, which will chime with about 90% of BAPCA & PCT Scotland members, who responded to our pre-meeting polls of members. I was disappointed that BACP didn't seem to have much more to say.

Lastly in the introductions, Prof. Darian Leader, College of Psychoanalysts, spoke in favour of statutory regulation, but in firm opposition to that proposed by HPC.

As delegates from the floor spoke some consensus started to arise. It became clear that almost everyone was in favour of statutory regulation and so AM asked for a show of hands, which was very close to unanimous in favour of regulation. This is close to the opinions of BAPCA & PCT Sc members, although our minority against is probably larger than that in the room. We thought that this was one clear thing Anne Milton will have taken away from the meeting – we could almost see her formulating policy as she spoke.

Andrew Samuel, Jungian Analyst, spoke passionately for the Alliance and asked that an incoming

Conservative Government would suspend the HPC project and hold a convention to decide the future of regulation in the UK. He also reminded the Shadow Minister that a legal challenge had been mounted against the HPC claiming that they are acting unlawfully.

By the end of the meeting our impression was that the Tories would probably follow the Labour government's line that HPC is the only show in town. Those at the meeting spoke as if legislation passed by Westminster would be followed in Scotland as well. A number of people made the point that many of the difficult issues HPC has grappled with unsuccessfully still needed solving, and changing the name of the organisation did not solve the problems. The biggest of these was the distinction between counselling and psychotherapy. Whilst BACP was clear in their opposition to splitting the profession there were a disproportionate number of people in the room in favour of separation, albeit that most of them represented small associations.

As we have thought for some time now, modality is not an issue. We know that some of our members think that the prescriptive nature of the HPC standards is anti-person-centred, but the same view was expressed by many modalities represented. Very few in our profession like the over detailed "cut and paste" approach to regulation which seems to be a part of the HPC mind set.

The Chair of HPC's defense of this was to claim that they realised that some of the generic standards needed reviewing and this process starts next year. I was feeling annoyed by this time and asked her why we had these generic standards foisted on us if they already realised that they need revising and why this fact had not previously been stated. I gave, as example, the standard to promote infection control. She replied that this was important in hospitals, to which I responded that most of our members do not work in hospitals and we resented having these meaningless standards imposed on us. The Shadow Minister intervened saying that she was annoyed by the HPC Chair, who would not serve her purpose if she didn't stop irritating people.

We left speculating that HPC realise that they had done a poor job on the standards and are now trying to dig themselves out of a mess by claiming that they were going to review the generic standards anyway.

Our summary is:

- Anne Milton seemed to go into the meeting with an open mind but seemed to settle on the idea that the profession is not, on the whole, against regulation.
- It was impossible to read her on the counselling/psychotherapy debate. We suspect that she has not made up her mind on this one.
- Fears about modality were not well founded.
- Most other modalities oppose the "medical model" as much as we do. Even the woman representing therapists within the NHS objected to the medical model which she felt was being imposed on them.

Apparently Anne Milton will be writing in the Guardian shortly on this subject.

Allan Turner.