Alcohol etc. (Scotland) Bill

COSCA (Counselling & Psychotherapy in Scotland)

As Scotland’s professional body for counselling and psychotherapy, COSCA (Counselling & Psychotherapy in Scotland) is pleased to submit this written evidence on the Alcohol Etc. (Scotland) Bill.

It is COSCA’s view that:

- one-to-one counselling and psychotherapy for problem drinkers should be used alongside any other means of addressing the public health issues surrounding levels of alcohol consumption in Scotland.
- voluntary sector counselling/psychotherapy services should be adequately funded and made available along with those provided by statutory and other organisations to people with alcohol problems
- the counselling/psychotherapy services provided to people with alcohol problems should be free at the point of delivery for those unable to pay for them or make a donation towards them.

The fact that there is no simple and single solution to helping people with serious alcohol problems to stop drinking should be recognised and acted on under the above Bill. The issues that cause many people to drink are complex and cannot usually be resolved at the first attempt. Therefore, in making counselling and psychotherapy available and accessible, it should be acknowledged and fully taken into account that a limited number of counselling sessions offered to people with alcohol problems may not be sufficient to help them resolve the multi-faceted nature of their alcohol problems.

Maintaining contact with people with alcohol problems who drop out of counselling and psychotherapy that enables them to more easily resume their involvement in therapy at a later date is very important to their recovery. Encouraging and facilitating a stop-start approach to the use of counselling services by people with alcohol problems is something that should be considered by the Scottish Government as a means of helping recovery. This approach much better reflects the fact that the process of people recovering from alcohol problems is irregular rather than straightforward, due in no small measure to the psychological, emotional, cultural and social causes of problem drinking.

Greater choice of the different approaches to counselling and psychotherapy should also be made available and accessible to people with alcohol problems e.g. person centred, psychodynamic and cognitive behavioural approaches.

To achieve the above goal, additional funding of training in one-to-one counselling and psychotherapy for people with alcohol problems delivered by
voluntary counselling organisations is urgently required in Scotland. This training needs to be professionally validated and adequate to meet the needs of people with alcohol problems. The training courses in alcohol counselling also need to meet the academic and professional standards that will be required in the event that the Government proceeds with its stated intention to statutorily regulate counsellors and psychotherapists (White Paper in February 2007: Trust, Assurance and Safety – The Regulation of Health Professionals in the 21st Century). The possible statutory regulation of this workforce is a devolved matter and a matter for the Scottish Government to consider.

COSCA’s website contains a large amount of information on counselling and psychotherapy and how and where to access counsellors and psychotherapists. www.cosca.org.uk

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