

Glenys Parry:

CAT competence: Culturally relative construct, political lever or useful training tool (or all three?)



I am a Clinical Psychologist and Psychotherapist, a Fellow of the British Psychological Society and Emeritus Professor at the University of Sheffield. I worked in the NHS for 38 years, training in cognitive behaviour therapy and psychodynamic therapy before specialising in CAT. I work with people with a wide range of mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, post traumatic stress, eating disorders, gender and sexual identity problems, recurrent relationship difficulties. I also work with psychological aspects of physical health problems such as heart disease, cancer, respiratory problems, diabetes, chronic pain and fatigue. I specialise in work-related stress and personality difficulties. As well as psychological therapy, I offer coaching, mentoring and therapy supervision. I am an accredited trainer and supervisor in Cognitive Analytic Therapy. Much of my research has been on improving psychotherapy outcomes and preventing harm from therapy. I have a long-standing commitment to using research to improve practice (and vice versa) and have led or contributed to many national policy initiatives in clinical psychology and psychological therapies.

Summary of presentation

Cognitive Analytic therapists in eleven nations collaborating in ICATA show it is now a genuinely international therapy method, and is likely to continue to develop worldwide. But can CAT actually be the same therapy across all these different cultural contexts and healthcare systems? A group of us (Allyson Waite, Dawn Bennett, Louise McCutcheon, Glenys Parry, Gabriele Stabler, Esther Gimeno Castro, & David Harvey) have collaborated on a project to start to test whether or not CAT is culturally specific, practised differently in different countries.

The concept of CAT competence was the starting point for this project. Competence in doing therapy has been explored by psychotherapy researchers internationally, to understand therapist effects on client outcomes. The view that psychotherapy training should focus on trainees' competence, rather than simply specify the training inputs, has also been gaining ground across a wide range of approaches.

The UK has a publicly-funded health care system where providing only so-called 'evidence based' psychotherapies is the dominant rhetoric. Research linking outcomes to therapist competence influenced NHS England to commission training only where competence can be defined. Within this political context, CAT has struggled for official recognition alongside Cognitive Behaviour Therapy. Yet CAT flourishes: training remains popular and CAT is widely practised within the National Health Service by many mental health professionals. It was in this context that a group of British CATs supported by Tony Roth from University College London (UCL) developed a competence framework along the same lines as others commissioned by NHS England, but sponsored by ACAT (Parry, Bennett, Roth & Kellett, 2020). So far, we have found that trainees value the descriptions and it was a successful lever for gaining official recognition, with NHS England providing £1.8m (€2.04m) for CAT training places over the next five years. But we do not know if it reflects CAT outside the UK. It could be over-specific to the British context, rather than reflecting the wider range of ways CAT is practised internationally. We set out to explore this issue in Australia, New Zealand, Spain and Chile. In a plenary talk, Glenys Parry will explore issues involved in specifying CAT competence and give an overview of the project methods and findings. This will be followed by a hands-on workshop led by members of the research team, to enable delegates to explore the resulting Framework, discuss its

implications and uses, and test the level of consensus on whether it truly reflects CAT practice internationally.

Parry, G., Bennett, D., Roth, A. D., & Kellett, S. (2021). Developing a competence framework for cognitive analytic therapy. *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice*, 94, 151–70. doi.org/10.1111/papt.12306