



Reflections on supervision

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Members

To judge from conversations with colleagues, very few acupuncture practitioners opt to have supervision. We have even heard the view that supervision is 'for people who can't cope'. We are currently in a supervision group, and our experience has been overwhelmingly positive. We decided it might be useful for us to reflect on and share some of our experiences.

We all came to supervision for different reasons. Roberta chose to write her BSc dissertation on supervision at the University of Westminster after being impressed by the changes she saw in people during the professional development classes led by psychotherapists in the final year. Maggie had prior experience of supervision as a manager in the social care and support field, working with challenging clients who often did not want to engage, where individual and group supervision provided valued space to reflect on goals, celebrate successes, share frustrations, challenge each other, and find a way forward. Beverley and Maggie were encouraged to attend a tutorial group while training at College of Integrated Chinese Medicine (CICM). We found this so useful that we persuaded our tutor to continue as our supervisor once we qualified.

Supervision plays an important role in combating the isolation that we can feel in private practice. Of course we build other support networks such as regional groups, phone calls, get-togethers with colleagues etc but supervision is different. Supervision involves a regular, ongoing commitment to a small group of colleagues, which sets up a unique dynamic and builds the trust that enables us to bring up difficult issues we are really struggling with. It is a commitment to put aside an evening a month, which involves time, expense, and the sacrifice of an evening's practice or leisure time.

And although we have considered meeting for peer supervision without a facilitator, we decided that after holding a safe space for patients in our practices, we

wanted the luxury of someone doing this for us. We have agreed with our supervisor that she takes the role of facilitator; holding the space for us to bring our issues, concerns and ideas, and develop our own approaches. We have worked out our mode of operating, agreed our terms and conditions, and pay for each session (even the ones we miss).

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These sessions give an opportunity to step back from the routine activities of being a practitioner, allowing us to reflect on broader issues. A shift in focus from 'points' and 'treatment principles' to other activities, such as practice management, managing patient expectations, managing our own expectations, identifying strengths and possibilities for development. We have all trained in different styles of acupuncture, bring a wealth of skills and experience from our lives and other careers, and have a wide range of interests within our practices. We all learn from each other's perspectives and insights.

Flexibility is key. Sometimes one of us brings a burning issue, and it turns out that others bring issues or experiences bearing on the same subject. At other times, we can feel that we don't have anything particular to discuss, only to find someone else working on something that we hadn't realised was also bothering us.

On occasion our supervisor will introduce a subject, prompted by an article, and suddenly two hours of lively discussion have passed and we are full of new ideas and perspectives. Or maybe one of us brings a perplexing case study and the group becomes very clinically focused for a while. The group offers a structure that is both free and safe enough to allow us to attempt to meet each of our needs, a space in which we feel safe enough to question and challenge. It also provides an invaluable resource outside of the sessions, to be able to phone or email the group to discuss patient or practice issues.

Supervision has played a major role in expanding our knowledge of the different frameworks and styles of acupuncture, helping us to leave behind the attitude of 'my style is the right style' and to appreciate acupuncture's rich diversity. We value supervision greatly, and regard it as one of the most important aspects of continuing professional development with its focus on reflection, analysis, and creativity. It is not always a comfortable experience; personal growth can be quite challenging. But with a trained supervisor, sessions are not confrontational or judgemental; they offer a safe space bounded by the rules of confidentiality.

We would like to thank our current supervisor, Gerd Lanninge, former supervisors, Beth Soderstrom and Sylvia Schroer, and colleagues with whom we have been in supervision in the past. We have been supported, challenged and inspired by the work we have done together.