

Editorial

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Keith Tudor & Rhys Price-Robertson

Addresses for Correspondence

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We have great pleasure in introducing this special issue—on Psychotherapy and Counselling During and After COVID-19: Practical, Political, Philosophical, and Cultural Considerations—to you. We realise, of course, that most of you reading this, not only in Australia but also in other parts of the world, are not so much living “after” COVID-19, as still dealing with the “during”. This includes managing the chronic and changing nature of the coronavirus itself, as well its implications for health, social contact, personal and working life, and, of course, the practice of psychotherapy and counselling.

Our interest in this topic and, specifically, to edit a special issue on it, was synchronous. Rhys initiated the contact (in May 2020) and Keith responded immediately and positively. In our initial exchange of emails, it was clear that we were “on the same page” regarding what we wanted to see or at least invite, which we expressed in the initial call for papers:

We invite submissions on various aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic, from practical considerations following the rapid move to online therapies, to broader explorations of the political, philosophical, and cultural implications of this unique global event for psychotherapists and counsellors. Submissions may cover—but are not limited to—the following themes:

- Challenges and opportunities experienced by practitioners (therapists, supervisors, and educationalists) during the pandemic;
- Clinical practices, skills, techniques, and insights developed in response to the pandemic;
- The psycho-politics of responses to the pandemic, including experiences of restriction, lockdown, isolation, and distance;
- Challenges presented by the pandemic to existing methodologies, epistemologies, and ontologies in the field of psychotherapy and counselling;
- Cultural considerations for psychotherapy and counselling during and after the pandemic (e.g., on the nature of reality, contact, clinical hospitality, and engagement); and,
- The post-COVID-19 future of psychotherapy and counselling.

We also said that we would welcome innovative submissions that reflect the creativity and diversity of current psychotherapeutic practice, including video submissions, transcripts of text exchanges, compilations of blog posts, and reviews of relevant films.

We have been delighted in the response and consider that the contents of the issue address most if not all of these points and our original vision for the issue. We are aware that, during the past year, while this issue has been in planning and production, there has been an enormous amount of research conducted on and published about the experience and effects of online therapy. This has included a number of special issues of journals on the topic, though, as far as we are aware, only two in the field of psychotherapy: *Group Dynamics* (Parks, 2020), and the *Journal for Psychotherapy Integration* (Callaghan, 2020). This makes the response to the call for contributions to this issue even more significant and we are grateful to the authors of all the submissions and to the reviewers of those submission, without which we could not have seen this through to publication.

Given that this particular editorial collaboration has extended across “the Ditch” (otherwise known as the Tasman Sea), it was perhaps inevitable that we have benefitted from more contributions from Aotearoa New Zealand to the journal than usual, and we both hope that this continues—and, indeed, perhaps prefigures greater collaboration between this journal and *Ata: Journal of Psychotherapy Aotearoa New Zealand* (of which Keith was the editor, 2012–2017). Also, we have been nurturing this issue into life at a time when *PACJA* has been expanding its editorial board to include more international colleagues and so we invited them to contribute their experiences to this issue. This, together with contributors from Aotearoa New Zealand, Portugal, Singapore, the United Kingdom, and the United States, makes this a truly international issue, which is, of course, reflective of the subject at issue.

Notwithstanding our international outlook, the first article in this issue starts more locally. One of our ambitions for this issue was to elicit contributions that account for cultural considerations and perspectives on online therapy, and we are delighted that the first two articles highlight this. The first is the written form of an online yarn/kōrero/meeting/discussion that took place between four Indigenous practitioners and three invited allies. In both the original online discussion (a link to the recording of which is available from the article) and the article itself, the participants/co-authors discuss the challenges and the opportunities presented to Indigenous psychotherapists and clients following the move to online therapy. We are grateful to Gina O’Neil for organising the original yarn/kōrero and for taking the lead in editing the original transcript into a peer-reviewed article—tēna koe | thank you, Gina.

The organisation of articles in this issue moves from experience and clinical practice, through education, and concludes with an article that encompasses some broader theoretical, social, and political reflections.

The second article, which the authors began in the first month of Alert level 4 in Aotearoa New Zealand (March/April 2020) offers some reflections on changing clinical practice in online psychotherapy, including Indigenous practice. The authors draw on examples from

their own clinical practices, as well as relevant literature, in focusing on the implications of the transition from the consulting room to online psychotherapy in cyberspace. They identify five themes in their practice and offer an integrative model of these themes.

The next three articles focus on different aspect of clinical practice. In the first, Jude Piercey offers three case reports: one of a long-term psychotherapy with a young girl, in which working remotely has, unexpectedly, helped the client to return from her “psychic retreat”; another of the impact of a father’s relationship with his anorexic daughter as a result of him working from home and, thereby, being more “available” to her; and, finally, of the increased the importance of the psychotherapy student observer of infant observation for the mother/caregiver baby couple crucial during lockdown. In the second of these three clinical articles, the authors discuss the challenge and benefits of the rapid expansion of video conferencing in response to the COVID-19 health crisis for the psychoanalytic encounter. Referring to the concept of “the analytic third,” and especially Jungian psychology, the authors explore whether physical proximity is essential to the creation of this vital psychotherapeutic phenomenon. In the third article, two couple therapists, who identify as “reluctant converts” to online therapy, reflect on their experience of being abruptly forced to shift from in-person to online couple therapy. They offer their views of the relative merits of the two formats or media and find benefits for both clients and therapists, and conclude with a useful list of “Zoom tips” for making couple therapy work well online.

The following three articles focus on education and training. The first provides details of an online psychological support service developed for students at the University of Coimbra, Portugal. The student users of this service reported numerous COVID-19 related difficulties—including academic issues, anxiety, isolation, sleep disorders, fear of infection, and exacerbation of previous psychopathology—yet reported high levels of satisfaction with the care they received. In the second article on education and training, the authors report on a mixed-methods study conducted at Auckland University of Technology, which surveyed students’ experiences of working clinically online during the pandemic. In general, students found the move online difficult in terms of the technological challenges, lack of professional clinical space, and establishing and maintaining the therapeutic alliance. A clear message from this research is that students desire more specific training in online therapy. In the third article in this section, Nathan Beel argues that, while the current Training Standards of the Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia mandate that the 40 hours of placement done in training must be delivered in the same room as clients, this “privileging of face-to-face experience may reflect outdated practitioner reservations that demonstrate inadequate awareness of existing research on alternative delivery formats”. He suggests that COVID-19 provides a good opportunity to reassess the training of psychotherapy and counselling students.

We conclude this special issue with an article written by nine members of the *PACJA* editorial board, each of whom reflect on some aspect(s) of their experiences of psychotherapy practice and education/training during the coronavirus pandemic. These

reflections encompass themes of disconnection and melancholia, as well as restoration; and the ontological, the ontic, and the existential. Given how much COVID-19 and the health and social responses to it affect every aspect of our lives, it seemed particularly appropriate to end this special issue with an article that addresses the personal, the professional, and the political.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge how much we have enjoyed working with each other in bringing this issue to fruition. We have remained “on the same page” throughout the process, and enjoyed the emergence of new “pages” through our co-creative process. We have each felt supported by the other at different times over the past year, and share a desire that this special issue supports psychotherapists and counsellors to navigate practice, a profession, and a world reshaped by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Authors

Keith Tudor is Professor of Psychotherapy at Auckland University of Technology (AUT), Aotearoa New Zealand, where he is currently engaged in establishing a Centre for Research in the Psychological Therapies. He is the editor of *Psychotherapy & Politics International*, which has recently published a special section on online psychotherapy in the context of global crises, and is currently co-editing a special issue of *Person-Centred & Experiential Psychotherapies on online therapy*.

Rhys Price-Robertson (PhD) is a gestalt therapist, social researcher, and Editor of *PACJA*. He has published widely on topics such as psychotherapy, social theory, mental health, fathering, and family life.

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