

Accredited Registers

Condition Review - National Hypnotherapy Society (HS)

November 2021

1. Outcome

- 1.1 We published our [2021 annual review](#) of the National Counselling Society (NCS) and National Hypnotherapy Society (HS) on 2 November 2021. This followed an appeal of three Conditions originally issued to the HS. Two of the Conditions were upheld, and a third re-categorised as a Recommendation. You can read the [report of the Appeal Panel here](#).
- 1.2 The Appeal Panel recommended that new evidence of compliance with the Conditions, submitted by the NCS/HS within their appeal, be promptly reviewed.
- 1.3 We reviewed that evidence and found that the HS had met the Conditions.

2. Background

- 2.1 We assess registers against our [Standards for Accredited Registers](#) (the Standards). Where a Register has not met a Standard, we can issue Conditions. A Condition sets out the requirements and the timeframe for a Register to meet the Standards.
- 2.2 The NS and HS' 2021 annual review was assessed against our previous [Standards for Accredited Registers](#). We refer to those standards throughout this report.
- 2.3 The two Conditions upheld concerned the HS. The Conditions were:
 1. Within six weeks of the publication of [\[the annual review decision\]](#), the National Hypnotherapy Society must publish a position statement on its website providing clear information about hypnotherapy to help service users make informed decisions. This should make clear that the HS is continuing to develop its position and that further guidance will be produced in due course. (following and in line with legal advice and updated Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) guidance)
 2. The National Hypnotherapy Society should develop guidance for its registrants about advertising and acceptable claims for hypnotherapy. This should take account of ASA guidance and reference any other factors such as new evidence. This should be published within six months of the publication of this report.

3. Areas addressed by the Conditions

- 3.1 At the HS' 2021 annual review of accreditation, we assessed how it fulfilled Conditions from 2020. The HS had been required to review how hypnotherapy practice was described, on its own websites and on registrants' websites, to ensure that there is clear information to inform the choices of patients and service users.

- 3.2 Our review had recognised the actions taken by the HS to address the earlier Condition. The HS had removed information that might contravene ASA guidance about what hypnotherapy can help with from its website and register. The HS had told us that it aimed to publish new information in line with legal advice and updated Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) guidance.
- 3.3 We had been concerned that the HS had removed almost all information about the practice of hypnotherapy from its website. The HS had not, at the time of our assessment, published new information to replace this. This meant that the HS was not providing clear information about hypnotherapy to help service users make informed decisions, so was not in compliance with [Standards 7f and 10b](#).
- 3.4 The new Condition One required the HS to provide short-term information about the practice of hypnotherapy. Condition Two allowed time for the HS to develop its guidance for its registrants about advertising and acceptable claims for hypnotherapy, with the benefit of legal advice and further guidance from the ASA.

4. Condition One:

- 4.1 The HS updated its [Types of Therapy](#) webpage with its interim position, and told us that this would also become their substantive position, if approved by the Authority. The HS would continue to review and update that information when updated guidance from the ASA was received.
- 4.2 We noted that the webpage makes clear that those seeking a hypnotherapist should first seek the advice of a medical professional for treatment of a medical or physical condition, and that hypnotherapy should not take the place of medical treatment or advice.
- 4.3 The webpage states under 'What is hypnotherapy' that:

'Hypnotherapy is the use of hypnosis in the treatment of a psychological disorder or concern, where hypnosis is defined as:

"A state of consciousness involving focused attention and reduced peripheral awareness characterised by an enhanced capacity for response"

(Advancing research and practice: The revised APA Division 30 definitions of hypnosis. Elkins, G.R., Barbaraz, A.F., Council, J.R., & Speigel, D. 2015, International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis, 63(1), pp1-9)
- 4.4 The webpage then advises 'what hypnotherapy can treat' in line with ASA and UK Code of Broadcast Advertising (CAP Code) rulings. This information reflected wording used by the ASA on its own [Health: Hypnotherapy](#) webpage. The HS page warns against posting testimonials and anecdotal evidence claiming that practitioners can treat smoking addictions. The page sets out that while GPs can refer to National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidance and prescribe hypnotherapy as a treatment for Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), the HS' present position is that registrants should follow the ASA Code and not claim that hypnotherapy is an effective treatment for IBS.

- 4.5 The page states that its 'interim position statement represents temporary guidance by the National Hypnotherapy Society in line with the requirements of the Professional Standards Authority. The Society is continuing to develop its position in consultation with relevant authorities and will publish full guidance for the public in due course.'
- 4.6 We found that the HS addressed this Condition by providing a clear interim position about hypnotherapy to help service users make informed decisions, that makes clear to its registrants what they may and may not do. The information is presented in an accessible manner. We noted the HS may wish to consider developing a further 'plain-English' definition of hypnosis in due course.

5. Condition Two

- 5.1 The HS provided its updated 'Guidance when advertising and practising as a hypnotherapist' for registrants. The guidance states that failing to follow its guidelines can result in a ruling against the practitioner by the ASA, and violate the HS' terms of registration.
- 5.2 That information reflected the public-facing interim published position, advising that registrants should not claim to offer treatment where there is not robust evidence that the treatment works, in compliance with the ASA and CAP. The HS told us they would update both public and registrant guidance when updated guidance from the ASA is received.
- 5.3 The HS was to develop its new Standards 'in line with legal advice and updated ASA guidance'. The HS advised it was following previous legal advice 'not to allow members to advertise contrary to those guidelines on the basis of any additional evidence we might hold.' The HS told us they had written to NICE and the ASA for further clarification. The HS sets out that registrants should contact CAP for specific advice, or that it can do so on registrants' behalf.
- 5.4 The guidance states that:

'For you to be able to claim you offer treatment for any condition – i.e. offer a treatment that has been shown to be effective for that condition, you are required to hold *robust evidence* that the treatment works, and to comply with the rulings of the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) and Committee for Advertising Practice (CAP.)
- 5.5 The guidance lists treatments accepted by the ASA/CAP. It also advises that anecdotal or testimonial evidence will not be sufficient to make claims about a particular treatment.
- 5.6 The guidance states that mental health conditions such as 'depression, addiction, eating disorders and other serious mental or psychological conditions' should be referred to an appropriate health professional, if the practitioner does not also hold the relevant medical qualifications.
- 5.7 The guidance makes clear that the use of hypnotherapy as a complementary therapy (for example to 'aid relaxation') must not be promoted as an effective medical treatment, for example to 'rid you of migraines'.
- 5.8 The guidance invites registrants to contact the HS for further information.

- 5.9 We noted the HS' guidance complemented requirements set out within its published [Code of Ethical Practice](#) (October 2021). The HS told us that it would attach the guidance to its Code of Ethical Practice in November 2021.
- 5.10 We noted that the HS submitted its response to Condition Two before receiving new legal advice or updated ASA guidance, but had confirmed its position that registrants must follow current ASA positions, regardless of conflicting information from NICE or other authorities. The HS will update its guidance and standards as new positions are set by the ASA. The guidelines will be annexed to its Code of Ethics. Breaches of the Codes may result in [sanctions](#) including removal from the register. We found that the HS' Standards have been made clear for registrants and these will enable it to monitor registrants effectively.

6. Team recommendation

- 6.1 We found that Conditions One and Two were met. We will check how the HS enforces its standards, in line with its guidance, at its next full renewal assessment in 2022/23.