

Cross Cultural Newsletter

4 June 2013

Dear Members

I must apologise for a belated Newsletter. We had our last meeting on 21st May. As usual, and despite the rainy evening, about 35 of our members attended the meeting.

The talk was on a much called for topic:

“CROSS CULTURAL PSYCHOSOCIAL MANAGEMENT OF CHILDREN IN NEED OF CARE AND PROTECTION: NAVIGATING THE LAW / CULTURE SENSITIVITY”.

The speakers were Ms Gloriann Scerri and Mr Craig Newby of CYFS.

The above issue has always been a subject full of dilemma for the practicing clinicians who are, unlike the speakers, not conversant with the legal perspectives. Aware of the complexity of the law, the speakers had provided hand-outs for the audience. For this reason, this newsletter would not address the subject in detail, save to provide our members with only an outline. Those interested in the details, please send either for the hand-out or the DVD.

The talk was divided into four sections: Care and protection overview, the practice of child care and protection, pertinent legislation, and a case study illustrating cultural sensitivities and how the protection team navigates these.

Craig introduced by providing an overview, stating that the CYFS's role is to respond to specific situations when children and young people are reported to be experiencing harm. Their brief is to focus on investigation and prevention. He then described the types of abuse such as physical, sexual, emotional / psychological and not least neglect, including medical neglect. Of these, emotional abuse is the highest, followed by neglect, physical and sexual, in this order. Having described thus, Craig named the various stakeholders involved such as the children, families, community, care / protection resource persons, advocates, counselors and the State. Although not frequently brought to the attention of the public, the frequency of abuse is not low. CYFS received no less than 410 reports last year. As to

various factors contributing to child abuse, Craig listed the following: violent or abusive parents; alcohol / drugs use; poverty and unemployment; solo parenting, stressful family relationships.

Gloriann followed by illustrating how CYFS responds to reports of abuse. She presented a flow chart related to the steps CYFS would take upon receiving such reports (Please refer to DVD or hand-out for details). She then highlighted the algorithms of intervention - the various steps such as how assessment is made; the tools utilised (including the “assessment triangle”; the three house technique for children and others too detailed to quote here); the steps for in-depth investigations; and finally the determination of response which is dependent on the nature and severity of the abuse. CYFS aims at intervention and therefore also responsible for liaising with others to provide services. This so-called “partnership response” in which other parties are called in to help, is likely to be of interest to our clinician members.

Craig then presented the potentially perplexing part of the talk: “Legislature relating to care / protection”. Not wishing to misrepresent the legislature, I am referring those interested to the DVD and the hand out. But in a nutshell, the law has components catering for escalating intensities of legal intervention from monitoring to guardianship. The law also empowers police enforcement of supervision if required. More of interest to our clinician members is Sect 66 which empowers the clinician to release information without consent.

Lastly, Gloriann presented a case involving a Polynesian family. This illustrated the difficulties in practicing child protection across cultures. Various hurdles are described, including lack of understanding of the New Zealand perspective in child care; language barrier; differing values pertaining to child care and parenting; and last but not least, shame. In short, the main problems lie in cultural sensitivity to external intervention from outside the extended family; and more significantly, shame. Gloriann illustrated through this case how these elements could be circumvented. Most importantly, respect, psycho-education and involvement of significant others in the group; and trading

supervision for practical help are important elements in navigating the cultural sensitivity and resistances. The talk generated heated discussions which extended late into the night. We did not finish until 8:30. There were three issues that seem to be the topics of concern. These would be further discussed with a panel of specialist in our forthcoming workshop on 25th June. Modified case vignettes would be used to illustrate the point. They include:

1. What constitutes abuse? Who is the abuser, the parent or the child?
2. Ethical and legal dilemmas: - Which side of the bread should the clinician butter? To be, or not to be? Which is more harmful? - reporting or not reporting.
3. Modulating differing cultural views on parent-child relationships, disciplining, and shame relating to perceived external legal intervention. What can the Western Clinician do?

By the time you receive this newsletter, the flyer announcing the next meeting would be out. Also, a DVD would become available. For those interested in the hand outs and DVD, please let Dianne Evans know. Her email address is: dianee@adhb.govt.nz.

Preview of next session

As mentioned, this is a follow-on session from the above entitled:

DILEMMAS IN CHILD PROTECTION: A WORKSHOP FOR THE PRACTISING CLINICIANS.

Please watch out for this.

Thank you again for your continued interest and support.

I look forward to seeing you all in our next meeting.

S Wong

On behalf of the Cross Cultural Group