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I often ponder on the strange fact that when there is talk of counselling or psychotherapy it is often euphemistically included in that umbrella term 'the talking therapies'. This is surely a misnomer. We do indeed talk, but more importantly we listen, we engage, and we communicate with our client/clients in various ways. Talking therapies are perhaps more properly communication therapies.

In this edition of HCPJ we are attempting to explore the ways that counsellors 'find their voice'. As Lead Advisor visiting numerous counsellors and counselling groups, let alone employers and other NHS officials, I have some thoughts of my own on how this might be better achieved.

Counsellors are often very focussed on their client work and neglect to give time to understanding the context in which they work. So my first thought is to engage with your context. Repeatedly I find that counsellors have not made the effort to understand the healthcare context either locally or nationally. There is a reluctance to think about, read about, or to even be aware of the pressures and strains upon the NHS, let alone be involved with the politics. Joy Harris, Isabel Gibbard and Sara Perren have all made the effort to do so, and their work is reported in this edition of HCPJ. Importantly they are looking at the process – what is going on underneath. As counsellors this should not be new to us! Isabel Gibbard, in a situation that concerns me, also offers a challenge in the way that students are used. The lesson here is to remember to engage internally and externally. Our voice has to be heard by our colleagues, even our professional association, and by those with whom we work – both need to hear our voice.

Many of us will recall being taught during our training to give feedback to enable criticism to be heard in a positive way. A manager recently complained to me that counsellors can be naively condemnatory of their colleagues in related professions, forgetting basic lessons learned long ago in their formation. Our voice will be heard if there is a certain generosity of spirit and if there is objective evidence on which to base our comments. Maybe point three is remember that feedback model or base your remarks or comments on evidence, tempered by affirmative remarks.

Further on in this edition Pat Seber, Deputy Chair of FHCP, continues her theme on Agenda for Change and reports on her work with UNISON. At last this is bearing fruit and there is a remarkable correlation between the draft proposals now out for consultation and the advice given in recent editions of HCPJ by FHCP/UNISON. This is quite an achievement, and it will affect counsellors in their employment for years to come. The message to us then is to be quietly persistent and consistent. Finally, you will find thought-provoking pieces in this issue of HCPJ on working with clients who have difficulty articulating their needs and feelings in the usual way. This is a timely reminder that counsellors and psychotherapists need to be inspirational and use imagination in their work.

Working with our clients is demanding, and uses all our faculties, so why are we surprised that finding our professional voice can be, at times, such hard work? All the skills of being a therapist need to be brought into play for ourselves as well as for others!

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and Psychotherapy*