

# COUNCIL FOR COUNSELLORS IN SOUTH AFRICA

## Background

The Council for Counsellors in SA is a non profitable organization serving as professional register for counsellors from the following ranks:

- Socio-therapeutic counsellors
- Ethno-medical counsellors
- Pastoral and spiritual counsellors
- Life style coaches

The Council was founded in 1995 as initiative of the Department of Sociology at the former Potchefstroom University of CHE now North West University, Vaal Triangle Campus. The objective was to make provision for the professional recognition of counsellors who are not psychologist. This includes: Professional guidelines for practice, (2) ethical code, (3) supportive training (CPD points), and (4) professional protection (professional indemnity and malpractice) (see Council for Counsellors Constitution).

In the process of gaining statutory recognition the Council affiliated in 2008 with the Natural Healers Association in the light of current legislation to provide statutory recognition to natural healers. The possibility for non-psychological counsellors to sort under this umbrella is spelled out by the draft legislation to implement traditional health care into the national health care system:

The spectrum of focus includes physical, mental, spiritual or social wellbeing of human and animals (p. 5). It states:

“Thus, philosophy/religion, psychiatry, physiology and biology, are all part of the conception of Traditional Medicine.

The office of the Council is:

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## Legislation

THE TRADITIONAL HEALTH PRACTITIONERS BILL (2003). This Bill was passed by Parliament in September 2007 . It provides for the establishment of the *Interim Traditional Health Practitioners Council of South Africa* to register natural healers, counsellors, and traditional surgeons.

Traditional (natural) healing is based on a holistic paradigm that is integral to the policies of the World Health Organization (WHO) in terms of the focus on *wellbeing*. The Alma Ata declaration of the WHO defined health as a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing, and not merely as the absence of disease and infirmity. This integrated approach to wellness is aptly summed up by Elstein as follows:

“The new medicine views optimal health as much more than the absence of sickness. Health is seen as a state of wellbeing in which the individual’s body, mind, emotions and spirit are in harmony with and guided by and awareness of society, nature and the universe”

We deem this as an unprecedented opportunity for counsellors to gain professional recognition. Counselling falls in the context of natural health care (alternative health) which caters for body soul and spirit. In addition to the Bill, the draft legislation

Registration will provide counsellors with a practice number which will give them the rights and privileges described in the Bill as:

- (a) *the maintenance or restoration of physical and mental health or function; or*
- (b) *the diagnosis, treatment or prevention of a physical or mental illness; or*
- (c) *the rehabilitation of a person to enable that person to resume normal functioning within the family or community; or*
- (d) *the physical or mental preparation of an individual for puberty, adulthood, pregnancy, childbirth and death”*

Note that this follows an holistic approach as it groups physical and mental health together. This is in line with the African perspective which is fortunately a holistic one which is very much in line with the emerging western understanding of the human person as integrated whole.

**The scope for Counsellors exclude the following:**

- The use of any psychological method or practice aimed at aiding persons or groups...
- The use of any questionnaire, test, prescribed techniques, instrument, apparatus, or similar method for the determination of intellectual abilities, aptitude, personality make-up, personality functioning, temperament, psycho-physiological functioning, psycho-pathology or personnel career selection...
- Hypnotherapy;
- The use of any psychotherapeutic method, technique or procedure to rectify, relieve or change personality, emotional, behavioural; or adjustment problems or mental deficiencies...
- The use of any psychological method or psychological counselling to prevent personality, emotional, cognitive, behavioural and adjustment problems or mental illnesses of individuals or groups (Government Gazette, No. 30374, p. 6-9, 19 October 2007)

*What does this mean?* It means that the abovementioned aspects do not fall within the scope of non-psychological (traditional) counsellors.

*Who are traditional counsellors?* Any person involved in the helping professions who is not specifically trained and registered as a psychologist. Most of the members of the Council for Counsellors do fall into this category. They work holistically and base their counselling techniques on an eclectic use of pastoral aspects, socio-therapeutic approaches, narrative therapy, body work, screening devices and intuitive regimens.

*Are all counsellors eligible to apply for registration at the new statutory body?* Yes, providing they comply with the broad requirements of traditional healing as spelled out by the Bill. This may include basic knowledge of the working of the human body, the use of herbal remedies, first aid (level 1) and an understanding of ethno-holistic strategies for diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation.

*When Can I register?* The Interim Council that will serve as statutory body is still in the process of being formed, although the Bill was already passed. In the meantime we encourage members to prepare for registration by doing additional skills level courses to meet with the broad requirements of holistic traditional demands. With skills level we refer to outcomes based courses in addition to your academic training. It integrates the counselling with health care in a truly holistic fashion to enable counsellors to work with the body, soul and spirit of the client.

*What are the benefits of registration at a statutory council?* The first benefit is obviously that of formal recognition and all the advantages that go with it as spelled out by the Minister. In her address to the National Assembly Health (as reported by Nombini Matomela) Minister Manto Tshababala-Msimang said the Bill would affirm the dignity and respect of this section of the health sector. She also added that the Bill recognises the unique circumstances of traditional healers, sets professional and ethical norms and standards, and seeks to empower them to regulate their practices. It was also pointed out by the Minister that registered professionals will be able to *claim fees from the medical aid schemes of their patients*.

*Warning.* We expect that no counsellor will in the future be allowed to practice unless they are duly registered with a statutory body. On the 19<sup>th</sup> October 2007 new regulations were published in the Government Gazette to regulate the scope of psychological practice in South Africa. This scope is defined in such a way that it excludes other counsellors from practicing counselling unless they are registered at an applicable body.

## **The future of counselling as natural health care**

At the moment the Department of Health is in the process of implementing natural health care into the national health care system in terms of the draft policy. The draft policy on African Traditional Medicine for South Africa was tabled in July 2008. The purpose of this document is to provide a framework for the institutionalization of African Traditional Medicine in the health care system of South Africa. It will provide a transformational process for formal recognition of the traditional system by allowing for the registration of Traditional Health Practitioners as well as developing and protecting African Traditional Medicine knowledge. The draft policy gives further structure to the policy of health care services to provide a range of health disciplines to the citizen. The spectrum of focus includes physical, mental, spiritual or social wellbeing of human and animals (p. 5). It states "Thus, philosophy/religion, psychiatry, physiology and biology, are all part of the conception of Traditional Medicine. Against this background non-psychological counselling can flourish.

The benefit of registering with the Council for Counsellors is that it makes the counsellor part of the health care system. Once the statutory body comes into existence, the Council will be in a position to recommend all its members for practice numbers.