

**22 December 2015**

**To: Royal College of Psychiatrists**

**From:** *Orkideh Behrouzan, Pat Bracken, Jyoti Chhabria, Chris Douglas, Nihal Fernando, Suman Fernando, Lauren Gavaghan, Tom Gilberthorpe, Michael Göpfert, Rex Haigh, Rukkya Hassan, Hamideh Heydari, Pieter Hilvering, Rhodri Huws, Sushrut Jadhav, Prem Jeyapaul, Bob Johnson, Bernhard Kelly-Patterson, Anna Ludvigsen, Brian Martindale, Hugh Middleton, Anthony Molyneux, Redmond O'Hanlon, Margreet Peutz, Tomasz Pierscionek, Hashim Reza, Asad Sadiq, Derek Summerfield, Alison Summers, Prasanna de Silva, Phil Thomas, Sebastio Viola, Jeremy Wallace, Eric Windgassen.*

**Re: The mandatory Prevent counter-terrorism workshops**

The Critical Psychiatry Network (CPN) membership would like to raise a matter of significant public import, one which the College does not seem to have addressed. It has become mandatory for clinicians across the NHS to attend a so-called Prevent workshop, part of the government's counter-terrorism strategy. The workshops intend to offer guidance on how to identify people who may be vulnerable to 'radicalisation' and on how to refer them on. Tens of thousands of NHS staff have apparently attended already.

Many members of the CPN have an objection to Prevent, and on two levels. First and foremost is a question of medical ethics. To us Prevent corrodes the ethics of the doctor-patient relationship, and primes us for a problematic deviation from the psychiatric assessment, advice and treatment we are here to deliver. We do not accept the premise that Prevent is merely an extension of already-existing safeguarding procedures. Our patients would be liable to view Prevent as basically a form of spying and of scapegoating, essentially about Muslim patients, and we can understand why. An example provided by a CPN member last week was of a young Muslim man with a mild depressive picture who would not have been seen as requiring referral for a psychiatric assessment but that he had mentioned to the GP that he became angry when watching events in Syria on TV. Some preliminary canvassing of psychiatric trainees in one NHS Trust has shown up considerable unease about the role they will be compelled to play.

Secondly, there is a question of civil liberties, regarding the psychiatrist as sentient citizen. Teachers, university lecturers and others in the public sector are

similarly being compelled to spy on their students and pupils. This is an ominous development within UK society, of a piece with the era of McCarthyism in 1950s USA. The advocacy organisation Cage has described such policies as consistent with a slide towards a “cradle to grave police state”. Last July Cage led and organised a joint statement opposing the Prevent strategy, with a letter published in the Independent newspaper signed by over 200 academics, activists, legal and medical professionals. (2). The Open Society Justice Initiative is currently undertaking a study of the impact of the Prevent programme on the health and education sectors in UK. Their lawyer Amrit Singh has told us that the programme goes further here than its equivalent in USA in that it aims to capture not just ‘violent radicalisation’ but also ‘non-violent radicalisation’ (ie. thought crimes). More than other medical specialties, bar possibly general practice, psychiatrists may be viewed by government as having particular access to a person’s intimate thoughts and perceptions.

It is remarkable that the Royal Colleges, the BMA and above all the GMC have said nothing about all this. When a CPN member contacted the GMC to confirm this, he was told that the GMC had no formal position on Prevent. But the GMC forwarded him the Department of Health guidance on the duty of healthcare professionals vis a vis Prevent, which presumably amounts to unconditional endorsement (1). For a statutory body whose raison d’etre is medical ethics, this is a dereliction of its core duty. Comparably, we suggest that the absence of any debate led by the Royal College of Psychiatrists, and their failure to take up a formal, published position, also amounts to de facto endorsement. We consider this unacceptable. The Prevent programme is in ethical tension with sound psychiatric practice and we would like the College to reflect this.

1. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/building-partnerships-staying-safe-guidance-for-healthcare-organisations>
2. <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/letters/prevent-will-have-a-chilling-effect-on-open-debate-free-speech-and-political-dissent-10381491.html>