

Friday 9 October 2015

Release: Delays to Regulation Puts Mental Health Patients' Rights At Risk, Counsellors Warn

Delays to the regulation of the counselling and psychotherapy profession is putting the rights and dignity of mental health patients at risk, the sector's largest organisation has warned.

The Irish Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP), which has almost 4,000 members across Ireland, issued the warning in advance of the World Health Organization's World Mental Health Day, which takes place tomorrow, Saturday, October 10th.

The theme of this year's Mental Health Day is 'Dignity in mental health'.

The IACP said that there was an urgent need for the Government to act swiftly and decisively and introduce regulation of the sector in Ireland.

Currently, any member of the public can do a weekend, unaccredited course in counseling and psychotherapy and the next day start to advertise their services and practice as a counselor or psychotherapist.

"Regulation in Ireland is long overdue – it was meant to be in place by June this year, but it has not happened yet," said IACP spokesman Shane Kelly.

"There is an urgent need for the Government to address this because it affects some of the most vulnerable people in society.

"Mental health patients should be afforded the same rights and dignity as other patients, but because the sector is unregulated, many clients are receiving substandard treatment from unaccredited practitioners," he added.

The IACP called on the Government to prioritise the regulation of the profession to ensure that patients received the appropriate treatment and support.

The organization also said that all other political parties should lend their support to the swift introduction of regulation, which would ensure that only fully accredited counselors and psychotherapists are allowed to treat patients with mental health issues.

"If you are feeling physically unwell, it's reassuring to know that the doctor treating you is fully qualified. We do not understand why patients with mental health issues should be treated any differently," Mr Kelly said.

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About the IACP:

Established in 1981, the IACP identifies, develops and maintains professional standards of excellence in counselling and psychotherapy through education, training and accreditation. In promoting best practice and the professional development of its members, IACP holds at its core the protection of the public. Representing both the interests of clients and practitioners, IACP provides a telephone referral helpline, an information service; and an online counsellor / psychotherapist / supervisor directory. IACP is a registered Charity (CHY 6615).

More information is available from the IACP's website www.iacp.ie