

## **Introductory Statement**

BPtK/NPCE Videoconference, September 29, 2020

Ladies and gentlemen, dear members of the NPCE!

I am very pleased that you are here today in our virtual space to take part in the exchange of information about the current developments in our profession. A special topic will be the status of the use of digital aids in our daily work in the treatment of mentally ill people.

I would like to welcome Dr. Kalteis from Austria for the first time in this circle. Also, Rosa Castro André from Portugal will be present today and will contribute in particular to the subject of "digital psychotherapy". Elena Gaudiesiute from Lithuania has been in our circle since her written contribution last year, but this is the first time she participates in person. Alberto Zucconi, Jorge Gravanita, Maria Karekla, Vasilis Vasiliou and Veronica Defièbre will be present. Iga Jaraczewska and Roman Viorel have announced written contributions afterwards, in case they cannot manage to enter the meeting. And Máté Kapitány-Fövény has sent us some information on the hungarian situation, which we will bring in during the session.

As a guest, Lee Hogan from the UK has dialed in. I think it will be interesting to consider the experiences there. In the Netherlands, too, digital approaches have long been part of everyday therapy. Rene Keet from the specialised mental health services in Noord-Holland (GGZ NHN) would have liked to report on this, but is in the middle of a relocation and will send us a paper afterwards.

From our side we would like to thank Angelika Kiewel once again for her support. Our research advisor Alessa Jansen is also listening in the background. Please be so kind as to introduce yourself before your presentations. We also made brief biographies of the participants available for everyone.

Before we get into the exchange and discussion, I would like to add an important technical hint: For comments, please use the chat function at the bottom of the menu bar and simply type in your name or the word „request“ and send the comment to everyone by pressing the Enter key. This will make it easier for us to keep an overview. As long video conferences are often tiring, we have planned a shorter session time for today and a short break at 11:30 a.m.

Here are a few introductory thoughts:

Corona has had a very special effect on mentally ill people and on the psyche of all people. The virus has brought about extreme changes in the work and life situation and, as a result, stress and insecurity for very many people. Especially the working situation for us psychotherapists has changed drastically, in particular during the time of the lockdown.

Here in Germany, we have had a prolonged discussion about the benefits and risks of digital consultation and the use of video, digital programmes and health apps in treatment. Due to Corona-related restrictions, video in particular has been used for psychotherapy by the vast majority of colleagues. I am curious to find out whether this has also been the case in your country.

But Corona has also significantly increased public awareness of our profession, the importance of mental health and psychotherapy as an effective and helpful intervention. Even before Corona, depression, for example, was the most common diagnosis in Germany, and the number of sick days due to depression, anxiety and stress disorders has more than tripled in Germany in the past 20 years. A German health insurance provider reports an 11 % increase in sick days due to mental disorders during the Corona period.

I am fully aware that we enjoy comparatively very good general conditions here in Germany with regard to the competences, rights and status of our profession and also with regard to cost coverage for psychotherapy by the statutory health insurance. We will certainly be talking about the different conditions in the various countries today.

But I am hopeful that with the new EU Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides a trained psychologist is responsible for health policy in Brussels. I very much hope, and also expect, that this will bring psychological health and the care of the mentally ill more into the focus on the European level. It is a concern of the EU Commission and also a declared aim of the German Council Presidency to bring health policies in Europe closer together. A priority for this and the forthcoming Presidencies will be to develop a European platform for health data, for example for installing a digital early warning system in the event of health crises, by agreeing on a safe use of data for care provision and research and more cooperation between the Member States in regard to health policy and in particular in the fight against COVID19.

I very much hope that this will be to the benefit of patients. And I also hope that the EU, the Commission and the Parliament, continue to focus

on the promotion of mental health and that they increasingly support national and EU-wide activities destined to improve psychotherapeutic care, such as our NPCE network.