

Cover Page

ECPS4015

Introduction to Counselling Skills

Choose from ONE of the following vignettes of a primary professional role and describe and discuss the counselling skills areas of competence that will be required for the role based on the Counselling Skills areas of competence document.

'P has been working in as a social prescriber in a local mental health charity in Wales, for the past several years, where social prescribing is being offered to some of its clients. Social prescribing is a means for healthcare professionals to refer patients via a link worker to non-clinical services in the local community. Social prescribing helps people to understand the underlying issues affecting their health and wellbeing. One of the many skill-sets that P offers is the use of embedded counselling skills within the role.'

AI Acknowledgement

I acknowledge the use of Copilot on 17th March 2025 to check my work using the prompt(s): 1. Please check the following text for readability, grammar and syntax. I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

Social prescribing has become a crucial role in addressing the non-clinical causes of health-related issues including mental health. With unprecedented pressure on primary care services, a social prescriber working within a mental health charity can bridge the gap between clinical healthcare services and community-based resources (NHS Wales 2023). To demonstrate effectiveness in the role, social prescribers must primarily work under the Social Prescribers Competency Framework (NHS Wales 2023) as this sets out the professionalism, behaviours, skills and knowledge required to fulfil the role requirements and its organisational objectives. The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) Counselling Skills Competence Framework sets out the required competencies for those who use counselling skills in their primary role. These competencies are used to enhance and support but not replace the essential competencies of the primary role. There are many primary roles that use counselling skills, such as support workers, practitioners, police and teachers, however, this essay will focus on the role of the social prescriber.

This essay will explore the areas of competence as set out by the BACP framework and their significance in the social prescribers' competency framework and role, highlighting their importance in fostering the collaborative social prescriber-client relationship, which in turn supports clients towards positive outcomes.

Social prescribing involves working with individuals to identify their needs, connect them to community resources via referral, and support their journey towards improved well-being (Polley et al., 2017). While social prescribers are not trained or qualified counsellors, they often use counselling skills to build rapport, explore client concerns and needs, and empower individuals to take positive steps towards managing their well-being. This involves making referrals to other agencies for

specialist support, for example, a client presenting with high stress levels because of housing needs would be referred to the local housing authority (NHS England 2020)

Social prescribers will work under the Social Prescribers' Competency Framework (NHS Wales), the first area of competency being 'knowledge'. This consists of the legislative and strategic context incorporating the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015, the Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2015, the Children Act 1979, and the Children and Families Act 2014 (NHS Wales 2023). It is expected that social prescribers will have awareness of these acts and maintain their knowledge as well as having a clear understanding of the National Framework for Social Prescribers. These Acts and frameworks underpin the very aims and objectives of the social prescriber role, which is to improve the wellbeing of individuals (NHS Wales 2023). Competence area one of the BACP framework is 'professional context'. This competency does not seek to replace but enhances the social prescribers' role and involves working within established legal, ethical, and organisational boundaries. Social prescribers use counselling skills in their primary roles but without compromising professional integrity (BACP, 2020). Social prescribers will often navigate multiple frameworks, such as those set by the National Health Service (NHS) or third-sector organisations, to provide appropriate individual care. The integration of counselling skills into the professional context supports the social prescribers' ability to build trust and rapport while adhering to policies and procedures. This ensures that interventions are both effective and ethically sound.

The BACP's second competency is 'empathy'. Empathy is vital to establishing meaningful, trustworthy, ongoing relationships with clients. Being able to empathise enables clients to feel heard and respected, thus creating an environment for the

relationship to grow. Carl Rogers (1961), founder of the person-centred approach, emphasised that empathy creates an environment of trust and acceptance. Being heard and understood strengthens the ability to explore, embrace and accept parts of the self that were previously rejected (McLeod, 2013, p178). Social prescribers demonstrate empathy by actively listening and validating clients' experiences, which enables a safe space for open communication. Empathising with clients, for example drug users, can support in the breakdown of stigmatisation and marginalisation of such groups, often improving outcomes for these groups (Batson, et al., 2002). By showing empathy and understanding, social prescribers can empower clients to explore their thoughts and emotions with the aim of identifying solutions to their personal challenges. This competency enhances the Social Prescribers competency framework area four: 'communication skills', such as 'developing and maintaining mutual reciprocal relationships' (NHS Wales 2023). The competency focuses on active listening skills, being respectful and honest, understanding the client's worldview, being non-judgemental, compassionate, supportive and sensitive. Empathy supports these competencies and strengthens the social prescriber-client relationship.

The third competency within the BACP's framework is 'skills and techniques'. The BACP Competency Framework includes the principles of the person-centred theory, which was first introduced by Carl Rogers. These principles, known as the core conditions, include empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence (Rogers, 1957). These principles promote understanding, acceptance, and genuineness, which are essential in building and maintaining effective relationships. These conditions empower professionals with the interpersonal skills and attributes that are required to establish respectful working relationships, which enhance the quality and outcomes of their practice. Counselling skills and techniques are used within motivational

interviewing (MI), one of the skills areas required for social prescribing. Miller & Rollnick, (2013) discuss some of the key skills for motivational interviewing (MI) such as reflective listening and summarising; allowing clients to hear their thoughts and feelings reflected to them. These techniques enable social prescribers to facilitate meaningful conversations, clarify client needs, and develop joint action plans which is essential to the role of social prescribing. For instance, a social prescriber might use motivational interviewing to help a client overcome their fear about engaging with community services (NHS Wales 2023). These techniques enhance the social prescribers' ability to guide clients toward positive changes.

The fourth competency within the BACP framework is 'working alliance'. This area of competence refers to the collaborative partnership between a practitioner and a client, characterised by trust, mutual respect, and shared goals (BACP 2020). This alliance is paramount to effective social prescribing, as it facilitates client engagement and commitment to agreed action plans. Client engagement is crucial as it fundamentally enables the client to explore solutions with the support of the social prescriber (NHS Wales). Social prescribers aim to strengthen the working alliance by establishing clear expectations whilst maintaining open communication, and involving clients in decision-making, especially around the use of action planning. As Rogers (1961) emphasised, the collaborative approach aligns with client-centred principles, ensuring that interventions are personalised and effective.

The fifth competency in the BACP competency framework is 'personal qualities'. This includes self-awareness, resilience, and emotional intelligence, which are paramount to effective counselling practice (BACP 2020). Practitioners must engage in reflective practice to recognise their emotions, biases, and limitations, to

better know themselves (Bager-Charleson, pp 13, 2010). This self-awareness enhances their ability to respond authentically to clients' needs. This aligns with the social prescribers' competency framework which recognises that personal biases are damaging to the social prescriber-client relationship, ultimately creating barriers to effective communication, resulting in poor outcomes for the client.

It is important to consider the personal trauma, if any, of the practitioner, and how working with clients with complex mental health needs may be re-traumatising, which could lead to potential barriers within the relationship. Compassion fatigue and burnout is another factor that can be damaging to the practitioner and the working relationship (Collins and Long 2003). Resilience is vital for navigating and managing the emotional demands of the role. Collins and Long (2003) highlighted the importance of regular supervision, ongoing training and peer support in enabling professional resilience. These resources help professionals to maintain their well-being and sustain their effectiveness in challenging environments.

To conclude, the five competency areas of the BACP Counselling Skills Competence Framework—professional context, empathy, skills and techniques, working alliance, and personal qualities, are essential for social prescribing roles in mental health settings. These competencies enable social prescribers to navigate the challenging and complex responsibilities of their role with confidence and compassion, whilst ensuring ethical practice. The BACP competency framework seeks to enhance the skills, behaviours and professionalism of the social prescriber and many of these competencies align and relate well to the areas within the Social Prescribers' Competency Framework. Together, these frameworks support and enhance a professional and integrated approach to helping clients; social prescribers can

empower clients to overcome challenges and achieve positive outcomes in their mental health and well-being. However, the successful implementation of these competencies whilst managing a demanding, fast-paced role within social prescribing, will require ongoing training, organisational support, and reflective practice whilst utilising supervision, which ensures the support and wellbeing of the social prescriber. The BACP competency framework therefore provides a valuable foundation for ensuring high-quality interventions and ethical practice in this advancing field.

References

Bager-Charleson, S. (2010). *Reflective practice in counselling and psychotherapy*. Learning Matters. Sage

Batson, C. D., Chang, J., Orr, R., & Rowland, J. (2002). Empathy, Attitudes, and Action: Can Feeling for a Member of a Stigmatized Group Motivate One to Help the Group? *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28(12), 1656-1666. <https://doi.org/10.1177/014616702237647>

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. (2020). *Counselling skills competence framework*. <https://www.bacp.co.uk>

Collins, S., & Long, A. (2003). Working with the psychological effects of trauma: Consequences for mental health-care workers – A literature review. *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing*, 10(4), 417–424. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2850.2003.00620.x>

McLeod, J. (2013). *Introduction to counselling*. (5th ed.). Open University Press

Miller, W. R., & Rollnick, S. (2013). *Motivational interviewing: Helping people change* (3rd ed.). Guilford Press.

NHS England. (2019). *Social Prescribing and community-based support: Summary guide*

NHS Wales (2023). Social Prescribers Competency Framework [Competences. The Competence Framework for Social Prescribing Practitioners in Wales. 2023](#)

Polley, M. J., Fleming, J., & Anfilogoff, T. (2017). *Making sense of social prescribing*. University of Westminster

Rogers, C. R. (1961). *On becoming a person: A therapist's view of psychotherapy*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Rogers, C. R. (1957). The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 21(2), 95–103. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0045357>

