

# **Recommended Quality Standards for sexual health training**

*Striving for excellence  
in sexual health training*



**2005**

# RECOMMENDED QUALITY STANDARDS FOR SEXUAL HEALTH TRAINING

**Recommended quality standards for those who deliver Sexual Health Training to professionals and volunteers in clinical and non-clinical settings. This includes staff in health and social services, education, youth and community settings, the voluntary sector and the criminal justice system.**

## INTRODUCTION

The first ever *National Strategy for HIV and Sexual Health* was published in June 2001 followed by a comprehensive action plan for national and local implementation. As part of the implementation plan, a training mapping exercise was undertaken and recommendations were made to implement a training action plan.

The following recommended quality standards will further support these strategic aims, and will enable the implementation of the Public Health White Paper 'Choosing Health' (2004) which identified training and workforce capacity issues as integral to the Sexual Health agenda.

These recommended quality standards offer a positive and constructive framework within which sexual health training can be planned, developed, delivered and evaluated. They provide markers of good practice, and should be seen within the context of wider government measures to improve sexual health, including the public service agreement target, the NHS Planning Framework and the inclusion of sexual health within primary care trusts' local delivery plans. They complement the *Recommended standards for sexual health* (2005) and the *Recommended standards for NHS HIV services* (2003) which also provide excellent markers of good practice, designed to help improve the quality of services and the patient experience.

It is recognised that both clinical and other professional organisations have sets of standards in place appropriate to their own speciality. These recommended quality standards for sexual health training are not intended to replace those, rather they provide examples of good practice which can be incorporated within organisations' existing standards to enhance sexual health training.

Training is defined here as a process where there is an explicit intention to enhance professional practice by increasing the knowledge, skills, understanding and emotional awareness of participants and the trainer's ability to work with all these elements.

## 1. THE AIM OF THE STANDARDS

Recommended quality standards for training will aim to ensure that all training, whether for clinical staff, other professionals or volunteers, provides a consistently high-quality experience. This experience should enable and equip those participating to deliver sensitive and appropriate sexual health advice, education, information, services and support.

## 2. THE AIMS OF SEXUAL HEALTH TRAINING

Good quality sexual health training requires a holistic and person centred approach encompassing all aspects of people's well-being, for example physical, psychological, emotional, social and spiritual well-being. To achieve best practice it should seek to increase participants' knowledge, skills, awareness and understanding.

The ultimate aim of excellent training should be to:

- Prepare training participants to offer high quality person-centred services
- Enable training participants to be competent in practical skills where appropriate
- Prepare training participants to support people (e.g. patients, clients, service-users, community members, students and pupils) to make informed sexual health and relationship choices

Good quality sexual health training can help to counter health inequalities. Evidence shows that discrimination exists in society and that people are discriminated against because of factors including, but not exclusively, gender, sexuality/sexual orientation, race, ethnicity and disability. This can impact upon people's health, including their sexual health.

The following factors affect people's ability to make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health:

- A sense of positive self esteem
- Having accurate information
- The acquisition and development of practical skills, such as negotiating and effective use of condoms
- An understanding of rights and responsibilities towards oneself and others
- Having a clear set of self-identified values in terms of sex and relationships

### ***Best Practice Sexual Health Training should:***

- Prepare staff to support individuals and groups to manage their own sexual health in ways that are enjoyable, safe and consensual
- Develop and promote an understanding of individual and collective rights and responsibilities in relation to sexual health
- Play a part in the reduction of inequalities, particularly in relation to sexual health education and sexual health service provision and delivery
- Support and promote partnership, multi-agency and multi-disciplinary approaches where appropriate
- Highlight evidence-based guidelines and best practice where appropriate
- Challenge discrimination, stigma and prejudice. This includes striving to provide equality of opportunity, valuing diversity and creating safe, co-operative, yet challenging training environments in which people can feel motivated and supported to change

## **3. SEXUAL HEALTH TRAINING VALUES AND PRINCIPLES**

The following values and principles are recommended to underpin good quality sexual health training:

- Sex can be a positive, pleasurable and life enhancing part of our experience
- Sexual health is central to everyone's health and well being
- Everyone has the right to feel safe and respected in exploring and expressing their sexuality, providing their sexual behaviour does not result in exploitation, oppression, physical or emotional harm
- Every individual has the right to control their own fertility
- Everyone has an equal right to:
  - Access confidential, accessible, respectful and non-judgemental services
  - Receive high-quality Sex and Relationships Education, information, support and advice
  - Be treated with dignity
- Contents of training programmes should not be influenced by commercial interest

## **4. STANDARDS FOR PREPARATION OF SEXUAL HEALTH TRAINING**

### ***Good training practice will ensure that:***

- National and local sexual health priorities, training needs analyses, evidence, good practice and evaluation of previous courses are reflected
- Learning outcomes and competencies have been identified appropriate to the staff group(s) being trained, and a monitoring and evaluating process is in place
- Learning from previous training has been considered and incorporated into future training where appropriate
- There is clarity about all aspects of the training, including its nature, content and who it is appropriate for, the learning outcomes and competencies and the evaluation, in addition to dates, times, venue, and numbers. There may also need to be agreement about commitment to change by the sponsoring organisation
- The venue is appropriate and values participants and trainers
- Managers of participants give their support to the training
- The contribution of service users, community members and visitors is valued. Trainers have the responsibility to familiarise anyone involved or brought into training with the quality standards
- A clear, accessible and transparent complaints procedure is in place whether under the auspices of the commissioning body or the training organisation

## 5. STANDARDS FOR DELIVERY OF SEXUAL HEALTH TRAINING

### **Content:**

- Training should enable participants to meet the learning outcomes and competencies by developing the knowledge, skills, understanding, attitudes and confidence to support people and offer excellent services
- Training should address the development of inter-personal and communication skills and should encourage the development and delivery of person-centred services, whether clinical or other
- Training should respectfully challenge attitudes and practice which may infringe or limit equality of opportunity, human rights and dignity
- Training should equip participants to work with diverse groups and individuals
- Training should engage people's intellect, experience, thoughts and feelings
- Training resources, materials and exercises should be up to date and reflect the values and principles outlined in these recommended quality standards

### **Style:**

- Training delivery should include participatory and experiential methods to allow for opportunities for discussion and exploration of attitudes. The venue needs to reflect this, by having flexible space for groups to break up into pairs or small groups, for example
- Training should be delivered in a climate where all opinions can be addressed in safety and where boundaries and working agreements/ground-rules are established and explicit
- Training should be offered in non-judgemental, respectful and sensitive ways using appropriate language

### **Evaluation:**

- All training should be evaluated by the participants and the trainer(s) and be reviewed, updated and changed as appropriate
- Evaluation of training should be shared with relevant bodies, such as commissioners

### **Trainers should:**

- Use a mix of content, methods and training styles which match the needs and professional roles of participants, to ensure the most effective learning
- Be aware of their own limitations
- Have relevant training experience, understanding, knowledge and skills
- Be supported by adequate systems for professional development, supervision, administration and resources
- Be clear about professional boundaries and know when and how to refer participants on to relevant sources of support
- Be adequately prepared for their role and – where relevant – be accredited
- Consider and address planning, delivery and reflection time
- Be expected and supported to continue their own professional and personal development. This might include training, external supervision, peer support etc.
- Work to the values base described here

## REFERENCES

1. Choosing Health Public Health White Paper (November 2004) series number CM 6374
2. National Strategy for Sexual Health and HIV (July 2001) Department of Health number 24527
3. Recommended standards for NHS HIV Services (November 2003), Medical Foundation for AIDS and Sexual Health, Department of Health, National Association of NHS Providers of AIDS Care and Treatment. ISBN 0-7279-1844-3
4. Recommended standards for sexual health (March 2005) Medical Foundation for AIDS and Sexual Health, Department of Health.

Above documents are available from the Department of Health Website at [www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk)

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## DH INFORMATION READER BOX

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