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Training psychological therapists in digital mental health: an e-learning course

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Equipping psychological therapists with digital mental health (DMH) competencies to enable delivery of services aligned with current aspirational policies is a recognised priority (Topol Review, 2019; [Digital First Strategy](#), NHS Long Term Plan, 2019). Existing online therapy guidance and training largely targets counsellors and psychotherapists working individually with adults in non-NHS settings (BACP, 2019; [BACP e-learning](#), 2020; [ACTO](#) competencies, n.d.). Psychologists, however, perform broader roles with a range of client groups, often in NHS settings, and as such present unique needs and challenges when delivering interventions remotely. A team of digital mental healthcare experts and stakeholders funded by the British Psychological Society therefore wrote a series of four e-learning modules basing them on published DMH competencies (www.digitalhealthskills.com), with structure and breadth of content reflecting clinical psychology competencies (British Psychological Society, [Accreditation through Partnership](#), 2019). This study describes the process of constructing and piloting this e-learning.

E-learning content was written by 13 DMH experts comprising psychologists, researchers, service users, trainees and industry representatives. The adaptation of psychological practice to online delivery covered psychological assessments (including psychometrics and neuropsychological assessment), direct and indirect interventions, supervision, research and leadership activities. Legal, ethical, and information governance issues pertaining to safe and effective online practice were also explored. Reference to the relevant UK policy guidelines and evidence base were integrated throughout. Feedback questions on usability and relevance were presented at the end of each module. A specialist elearning company was employed by the BPS to transfer our content to the Articulate Rise platform. Creating visually attractive, culturally diverse, interactive and engaging content was emphasised. The present authors reviewed and refined the material before the final version was ready for piloting.

Designing and piloting the elearning took place between September to October 2021. First year trainees from two UK clinical psychology doctoral training courses were approached with 47 trainees completing the elearning. Qualitative feedback on the elearning content was given by 37 trainees, of which 33 gave positive feedback with suggested improvements including adjustments to formatting and reduction of repetitive material. Some participants commented that the completion time per module was longer than expected (90 mins rather than 60).

After some small adjustments, the final version of the elearning will shortly be made available for free to all psychologists and psychological therapists via BPS Learn. A future

planned evaluation will explore the impact of the eLearning on the DMH knowledge, skills and attitudes of psychological professionals compared to a wait list control. Given the rapid transition to online working prompted by the covid-19 crisis, our DMH elearning provides a significant, unique and timely contribution to the training of psychological professionals in safe and effective DMH practice.