

## **Family Therapy Unit of Attica Psychiatric Hospital: In 25 years what has stayed the same and what has changed?**

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*Kyriakos Katzourakis paint*

The Family Therapy Unit of the Attica Psychiatric Hospital was set up in 1994 by two psychiatrists of Attica Psychiatric Hospital, Fotis Kotsidas and Katia Charalabaki.

What made them go on to set up a family psychotherapy centre?

Both were trained in systemic family therapy and were interested in practicing family and couple psychotherapy.

However, at the same time, there was a vision of psychiatric reform. Therefore, in this context the Unit was set up in Pagrati, dealing with asylum practices from transition to asylum (i.e. abolition) and to psychotherapy practices outside the asylum.

As is evident, this experiment, which was the earliest in the history of the NSS, was carried out on 'guinea pigs', on a small islet in Pagrati, surrounded by a vast asylum ocean.

The work was both interesting and charming, but at the same time difficult.

In 25 years, almost a quarter of a century, a story has been written. To justify it being history, it must have a dialectical continuity and not be repeated because, as Marx said, "History repeats itself, first as tragedy, second as farce."

So, then, we can look back and see what's stayed the same and what's changed.

### **What has stayed the same?**

Values.

We don't accept "back-handers".

We do not do "favours under the table". The trainees we choose do not have a "friends in high places". Every September, before the start of the new academic year, we receive a plethora of phone calls from administrations, ministries, colleagues, acquaintances and friends who say: "Take Mrs/Mr...in your programme...". We have found a "cliché" as a response: "Don't tell me a name because ... she/he will be rejected."

We ignore the word "family democracy". If one enters some university campus and whispers the word "nepotism" the building will fall down. Our children refused *and because they were not asked* to sit in our chair.

We deny commercialization. We are out of all kinds of advertising, trying to tackle authenticity, sincerity, modesty and genuine care for the healed and human values.

Does this mean that we are perfect, saints? Of course not, we simply joined in *a collective effort to uphold some principles*.

## **What has changed?**

The numbers.

We'll see can see and reflect on the impressive numbers, but we can't just see them as numbers. They need to be signified by our experience and thought, both of us as psychotherapists but also of our patients.

I find experience to be the greatest teacher of a therapist and, within 25 years, that experience has enriched us. At first we were "politically correct" in applying the theory we had been taught. Now, the theory we have learned has been profoundly modified by the wealth of experience.

### *Examples:*

One way mirror:

We were taught that the therapist receives phone calls from the mirror team, as well as taking a break in a session to confer with them. Along the way we have found that this interferes with the session and deteriorates the therapeutic relationship.

One way mirror in couple therapy and in individual therapy:

We were taught to have a one-way mirror in both types of session. However, we have removed them completely. In the case of couple therapy because the mirror acts as a "keyhole" into the couple's bedroom and in individual therapy because it interferes, parasitically, with the patient-therapist relationship, that is to say, "transference and counter-transference".

Nevertheless, changes have also taken place in our "clientele". Especially in the last eight years, the material of our healers has become a novelty: we face problems we have never seen or learned about so there is a change in our attitude towards them. For example, we are becoming less and less distant, intervening more and more humanly, trying to provide a greater supportive framework for those suffering and towards their suffering. And yet, we are becoming more and more "self-revealing", sharing personal experiences and difficulties with our clients.

In education, too, there have been significant changes over the years. As educators we have become much more experienced (educational teams are

increasingly experiencing something between education and group psychotherapy).

But also we as therapists, like all the workers in our Unit, have experienced co-evolution, which has not always been a bed of roses. Often it is a rough road, with contradictions emerging between associates, and scenes of verbal domestic violence (fortunately, only verbal) were unfolding in our, otherwise, serene and hospitable Unit.

We also had similar problems with the "Archetypal Mother", the Psychiatric Hospital of Attica, which at times sought our psychotherapeutic assistance with patient families, while at other times undermined or rejected us.

One of the important elements of our job was to maintain relationships with teachers or colleagues in Family Therapy from various European countries, such as Mony Elkaim, Jacques Pluymaekers, Chris Dare, Huan-Louis Linares, Jaakko Seikkula, John Shotter, Peter Rober, Maria Borcsa, by organizing daily and experiential workshops.

As for our country, we have to thank many colleagues who have supported both the staffing and the work of the Unit.

Finally, we would like to thank all the healers who trusted us.

In closing, I would like to say that an anniversary (whether of a wedding or a foundation) is always a time that unites, rejoices and creates new expectations for the future, not forgetting the difficulties or to idealize history through a narcissistic presentation, but because, after all, an anniversary is the historical reminder of the fact that *a system remained open and alive and did not sink into its underground currents of entropy.*