

Standards & Ethics

The ACTO Research & Development Working Group

Hello, my name is Pip Weitz and I am the Research & Development Director for ACTO. It's a really lovely position to hold as there's just so much to think about in terms of research and also with artificial intelligence, virtual reality, apps, online platforms, cloud-based storage, web tools etc all coming within this remit of development of the online therapy profession. And of course there's the dreaded GDPR which wings its way soon.

The ACTO Research & Development Working Group has two aims:

Firstly, to collate and provide an invaluable research –based resource for ACTO members, which in turn will influence the wider online profession, and most importantly, provide a rich tapestry of support for our clients / patients. This includes also ensuring that we liaise with external organisations and to encourage them to join us as organisational members.

Secondly, to increase the employability of online therapists through our projects and disseminated knowledge; which will provide employers with the evidence and a better understanding of the efficacy of online therapeutic work.

Our group is made up of online therapists from a wide variety of backgrounds, drawn from ACTO members, with one exception: where we co-opted in a colleague who specialises in data security.

So what are we doing? We recognise that ACTO has a wonderful opportunity to draw together the evidence-based research that is being done around the country, and abroad; to create one comprehensive, central storage place from which to access this growing collection of research.

Another example of a project we're working on, is to develop an online library - we are engaging with a University for this. We want to make sure that we have a library that is really useful because ultimately we know that this knowledge and evidence can make the difference for an NHS commissioner looking to service or a new member of staff is the evidence-based research that buttresses the training that you've all got. By this time next year there should be a richness that will be available for you as a resource.

We will support researchers in their work and influence the type of research undertaken. In ACTO we have specialist therapists delivering online care; that this is a remarkable resource for researchers. But of course it needs managing and invite you to keep an eye on the website on the R&D working group as we will post up all research projects and our activities as they come to fruition.

Thinking about robust research, I have been very struck by ORCHA's (<https://www.orchac.co.uk/>) way of assessing apps using three foci: data security, clinical effectiveness and user experience. If we promote anything in ACTO we will use these three important considerations. It's a really exciting time to be involved in research and development and online therapy particularly as the NHS is looking seriously at how to involve digital within mental health care.

On the research front we are currently launching a pilot with CORE to see, from both organisations' point of view, how CORE might work for those working therapeutically only. The pilot will take around 3 – 4 months and then we will write it up as part of the evaluation.

Association for Counselling and Therapy Online

We are clear about the importance of maintaining an open and enquiring approach to everything we investigate; keen to have our existing knowledge and experience challenged as the online therapeutic world evolves.

If you would like to contribute in any way to the group or have access to research or knowledge that you think would be useful to our members please email us at rd@ACTO-org.uk. Thank you.

Philippa Weitz
Research & Development Director, ACTO