

Colleagues, Friends, and Co-Workers,

For many years, therapists and counselors who work closely with the BDSM/kink communities—on the front lines of helping people who are kink-identified or practicing BDSM—have often struggled to serve in relative isolation. Over the years, they have honed their clinical judgments and approaches, figuring out what works and what is harmful when working with kink-involved clients. There have been a few important publications of these insights, and calls for further work in this area, coming from a various corners of the mental health field.

However, the past few years have seen significant changes in the culture of Western English-speaking countries and in the field of mental health. There are more and more people finding their way into kink and BDSM. There may be a decline in the power of the stigma attached to these sexualities. There is also more demand and more opportunities for specialized training in working with kink/BDSM involved clients and patients in the field of mental health.

As these changes unfold, though, there are new challenges, and new opportunities. One challenge is being able to assess whether or not a counselor or therapist has the knowledge, skills and attitude that embody competent care for kink-identified clients. One opportunity is that we have enough critical mass and momentum, in terms of clinical experience and in terms of research, to start to articulate what competent care might include.

This project—which we are calling the Kink Practice Guidelines Project for now—has the goal of producing clinical practice guidelines for mental healthcare providers, when working with kink/ BDSM involved patients and clients. We want these guidelines to reflect the best clinical judgment and experience, and the most up-to-date empirical research, that we can gather.

By creating these guidelines, we hope to move the entire field of mental health further towards providing competent care to these people we care so much about.

Practice guidelines are aspirational. They are meant to articulate goals and standards that professionals can strive for, to guide their own professional development and to increase the quality of services they offer.

We are conscious of the struggles around language, culture and diversity. We want it to be clear that any practice guidelines we create are going to be limited by our particular cultural positions, and will miss some important issues and not apply easily, or sometimes at all, to some portions of the kink / BDSM communities or populations around the planet.

Still, we feel this is a good time to start that journey, to make space for those larger conversations, by first putting together and articulating to the best of our abilities a statement about compassionate, caring and competent therapy for kink-identified or BDSM-practicing people.

Welcome to the project.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Spratt". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and "S".

**Richard Spratt, PhD**

*Kink Clinical Practice Guidelines Lead*