

### **An Italian “Consensus Conference on psychological therapies for anxiety and depression”**

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On November 18-19, 2016, Ezio Sanavio, Professor of Clinical Psychology at the University of Padua (Italy), organized a meeting in Padua entitled “Psychological therapies for anxiety and depression: Benefits and costs” (Sanavio, 2016; Research Group for Treatment for Anxiety and Depression, 2017; Migone, 2017a). The main speaker at this conference was professor David Clark, of London, who, together with the economist Richard Layard, of the *London School of Economics* (LSE), in 2008 launched the English program *Improving Access to Psychological Therapies* (IAPT), that since then is implemented in the National Health Service in the UK (Clark, 2011, 2012, 2017, 2018; Clark *et al.*, 2008, 2009, 2017; *London School of Economics*, 2006; Layard & Clark, 2014). The two starting points of the IAPT program, presented in detail by Clark at the meeting, were the following: according to the empirical evidence, as shown also in the recommendations of the English *National Institute for Health and Care Excellence* (NICE), in the treatment of common mental disorders such as anxiety and depression psychotherapy is often more effective than medication (there are fewer relapses and long lasting outcomes) (American Psychological Association, 2013); as suggested by the *London School of Economics*, improvement of access to psychological therapies in mental health services could achieve not only greater well-being for patients, but also an economical gain for the national finances (less absences from work, lower indirect costs, etc.).

After the Padua meeting, professor Sanavio and other colleagues decided to create a “Consensus Conference on psychological therapies for anxiety and depression”: a Sponsoring Committee started to work in 2018 and designated a Scientific Committee to gather evidence about efficacy and effectiveness of psychological therapies for anxiety and depression, to review their patterns of use in Italy, to identify the ways to disseminate information about evidence-based treatments and to make them accessible in the National Health Service. In 2022 this Consensus Conference completed its work, and the Final Document of a “Consensus Conference on psychological therapies for anxiety

and depression” (Working Group “Consensus on Psychological Therapies for Anxiety and Depression”, 2022; Barbato *et al.*, 2022) has been published in the web site of the Italian National Institute of Health (*Istituto Superiore di Sanità*), which is the main governmental agency for research, control and technical-scientific advice on public health in Italy, and which is sponsor of this Consensus Conference together with the University of Padua.

This Consensus Conference reviewed the main international guidelines (English, American, Australian, etc.) for the treatment of common mental disorders, that recommend that psychotherapy should be considered as a first choice treatment, while physicians, both due to the training they received and the pressure exerted by pharmaceutical companies, often limit themselves to prescribing medications without suggesting a psychotherapy. It would therefore be in the general interest to increase access to psychological therapies in mental health and in primary care services, and for this reason it would be necessary to invest in hiring psychotherapists (who are employed in very limited numbers today in the Italian National Health Service) and organize adequate training in evidence-based treatments for psychiatrists and psychologists who work in the public sector. The specific aspects concerning childhood and adolescence should also be taken into account, given the complexity in research and clinical practice in this area. In Italy there are thousands certified psychotherapists who completed a full 4-year psychotherapy training after graduation in psychology or medical school, with dedicated personal supervision and 400 hours of internship in the public Mental Health Services, according to a specific national law (no. 56/1989), and are included in the National Board of Psychotherapists. Today patients who need psychotherapeutic treatment must resort to the private sector, with unacceptable wealth discrimination and disrespect for the Italian Constitution (Sanavio, 2022, p. 17).

The final document of the Consensus Conference, of 117 pages, is both in Italian and in English (Working Group “Consensus on Psychological Therapies for Anxiety and Depression, 2022), with an Introduction by Silvio Brusaferrò (President of the *Istituto Superiore di Sanità* of Rome) and a Presentation by Silvio Garattini (President of the *Mario Negri Institute for Pharmacological Research* of Milan and of the Jury of the Consensus Conference). This document includes the Report of the experts prepared for the Jury, and recommendations of the Jury in the following four areas: A.

Current knowledge on the access to treatment of people with anxiety and depressive disorders, and the scientific evidence and appropriateness of treatments; B. Instruments to identify people with anxiety or depressive disorders; C. Training for the provision of in-depth knowledge and competences in the psychological therapies for anxiety and depressive disorders; D. Resources, organizational models, and diagnostic and therapeutic training necessary to improve people's access to psychological therapies.

The Final Document of the Consensus Conference represents an important contribution for the improvement of policies in the field of mental health in Italy; it should be disseminated among mental health professionals, policy makers and the media, it could possibly stimulate similar approaches in other countries and have multiple meanings from both a cultural and scientific point of view.

After the Consensus Conference completed its works, a Permanent Committee of the Italian "Consensus Conference on psychological therapies for anxiety and depression" was created, with the following members, listed here in alphabetical order: Angelo Barbato (Mario Negri Institute for Pharmacological Research, Milan, Italy), Massimo Biondi (Department of Human Neurosciences, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy), Gioia Bottesi (Department of General Psychology, University of Padua, Italy), Elena Bravi (Department of Mental Health, Psychology Unit, Province of Trento, Italy), Gemma Calamandrei (*Istituto Superiore di Sanità*, Rome, Italy), Nino Dazzi (Department of Psychology, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy), Paola De Castro (*Istituto Superiore di Sanità*, Rome, Italy), Santo Di Nuovo (Department of Educational Sciences, University of Catania, Italy), Gerardo Favaretto (Department of Neuroscience, University of Padua, Italy), Mario Fulcheri (Department of Psychological, Health and Territorial Sciences, University of Chieti-Pescara, Italy), Silvio Garattini (Mario Negri Institute for Pharmacological Research, Milan, Italy), Claudio Gentili (Department of General Psychology, University of Padua, Italy), Antonella Gigantesco (*Istituto Superiore di Sanità*, Rome, Italy), David Lazzari (Italian Board of Psychology, Rome, Italy), and Department of Psychology, Terni General Hospital, Italy), Paolo Michielin (Department of General Psychology, University of Padua, Italy), Paolo Migone (*Journal Psicoterapia e Scienze Umane*, Parma, Italy), Luca Muglia (UNCMLab@Science and Child Law Research, Rome, Italy), Piero Porcelli (Department of Psychological, Health and Territorial Sciences, University of Chieti-Pescara, Italy), Daniela Rebecchi (*Studi Cognitivi*, Milan and Modena, Italy),

Ezio Sanavio (Department of General Psychology, University of Padua, Italy), Renata Tambelli (Department of Psychology, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy).

The Permanent Committee has four committees: Editorial Committee, Training Committee, Developmental Age Committee, Sensitization and Monitoring Committee.

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