

## What is a Therapeutic Community?

---

Therapeutic Community (TC) treatment offers a radically different group-based approach for serious neurotic, personality disordered and long-term mentally ill people. Its principles can be applied to the therapeutic care of a wide range of patient groups in different settings, including the community. The TC embraces a set of methods which aim to treat people suffering from emotional disturbance in a communal atmosphere. TC principles are based upon a collaborative, democratic and deinstitutionalised approach to staff-patient interaction. Highlighting this approach, patients are generally referred to as residents or members of the community. Traditional staff/staff and staff/member hierarchies are replaced by a more liberal, humane and participative culture.

The Therapeutic Community offers a safe environment with a clear structure of boundaries and expectations where members have the opportunity to come to terms with their past through re-enactment within a treatment setting involving other members and staff. Group psychotherapy and traditional psychoanalysis are integral to the treatment, but TCs also offer the individual experiences to awaken creative and social abilities. Members tend to learn much through the routine interactions of daily life and the experience of being therapeutic for each other. Through this psychosocial therapy the aim is to encourage members towards a better understanding of their previous behaviour and to enable them to improve their inter-personal functioning, first within the therapeutic community and ultimately in the wider community. Encouraging and reinforcing the notion of personal responsibility and sharing, members and staff meet together on a regular basis to discuss the management and activities of the community, to assess applications for admission and to support leavers.

Members of Therapeutic Communities are not normally detained under the Mental Health Act; attendance is generally voluntary, and to benefit from participation in a TC, the member must be positively motivated to change his/her behaviour, to co-operate in group therapy and to accept the rules of communal living.