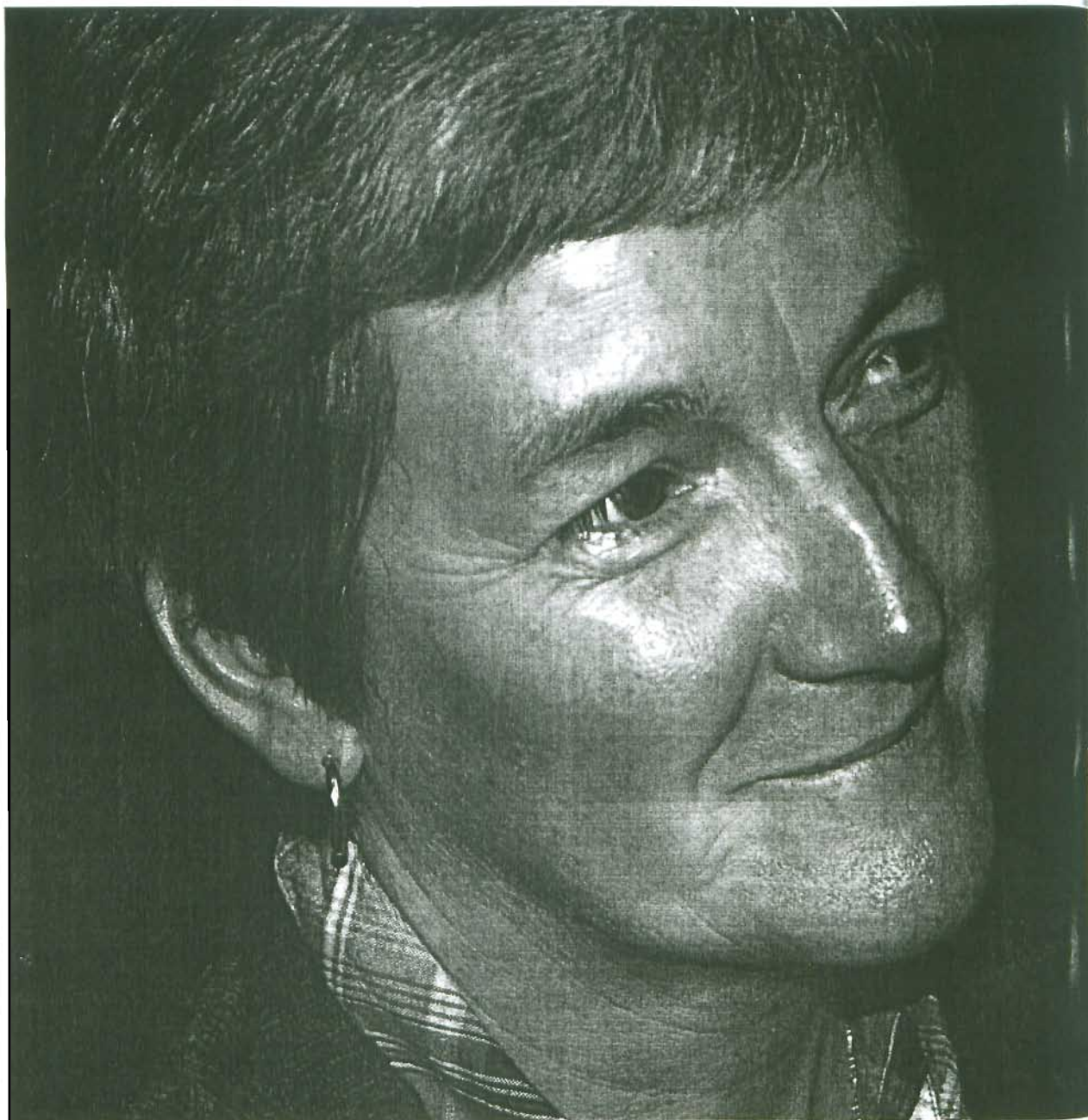


# We are fa

“Family therapists are under-represented and we would very much welcome those from other diverse groups”



**Q: What is the Association for Family Therapy?**

**A:** The Association for Family Therapy and Systemic Practice in the UK (AFT) is the leading professional body representing those working with families in the public, independent and third sectors in the UK. AFT's key aim is to benefit the public by working to continually improve standards of professional family and systemic psychotherapy and systemic practice. AFT has many other activities.

AFT members are multi-disciplinary as well as clinically qualified family and systemic psychotherapists. AFT welcomes those trained or training in related disciplines who wish to develop their understanding and skills in supporting relationships. Its members include clinical psychologists, child and adult psychiatrists, teachers, occupational therapists, primary mental health workers, community psychiatric nurses, social workers, parenting practitioners,

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Now part of the Unite Health family, Theresa Hendra, Chair of the Professional Affairs Committee, explains the role of family and systemic therapists in today's society and how Unite is helping to support their members

Theresa Hendra, Chair of the Professional Affairs Committee

mediation and CAFCASS (Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service) staff, couple and family counsellors, general practitioners, health visitors and others working with and/or training and managing those who work with families.

AFT supports, registers and accredits foundation, 'mid-level' and advanced training in systemic practice and family and systemic psychotherapy throughout the UK. Its training

standards and guidelines are the basis for professional registration and accreditation. It also works to develop professional and wider understandings of strength and resilience in families and supportive communities, and the importance of these to individual and social well-being.

AFT and its members have many skills and much experience to offer families and those commissioning and developing family-focused services.

**Q: What is family and systemic psychotherapy?**

**A:** Family and systemic psychotherapy is a distinctive psychological therapy for individuals, couples, children, families, carers and their support networks provided by clinically trained family and systemic psychotherapists. It aims to maximise family strengths and resilience to help people overcome problems experienced by individual family members or the family as a whole. It helps family members understand how they function as a family and to develop more helpful ways of interacting and supporting family members. We work in ways that acknowledge the contexts of people's families and other relationships, sharing and respecting individuals' different perspectives, beliefs, stories and exploring possible ways forward for their recovery.

Family therapy takes place in many settings:

- Public services, for example in schools, in child and adolescent mental health and adult mental health services, early intervention services and services for looked-after children
- In private practice
- In many third sector services, including those providing family and couple counselling and parenting support

Family and systemic psychotherapists often work in multi-disciplinary teams, particularly in clinical settings, and have played a leading role in developing successful models of multi-agency and multi-disciplinary team working in the UK. Many also work without teams, as individual therapists. They may see children and adults individually and/or in family-member groups.

We recognise the impact of inequalities arising from gender, race, ability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, culture, religion, age, social class, socio-economic status and employment, and consider these when working with families and developing constructive interventions. We explore ways in which social, political, environmental and cultural aspects influence families we work with.

We have the skills to deliver high-quality interventions to families experiencing serious problems, and also the knowledge and expertise to provide training, support and supervision for those who provide family interventions with a lower level of training.

We work in ways that support change for individuals and their significant relationships, in their families and beyond.

“ We need to retain our links with Unite as we have gained a great deal of support ”

< People experiencing problems and those important to them are supported to understand their difficulties better, develop relational strengths, work together towards recovery and make improvements in their lives.

**Q: What are the particular challenges facing family and systemic psychotherapists today?**

A: Challenges for the next year will more than likely be linking with Skills for Health and developing identified competencies for different levels of psychological therapy interventions. We also await the outcome of appeals post Agenda for Change (AfC). It would be great to think we could develop more family and systemic psychotherapists along with systemic practitioners.

Families can be caught in cycles of harm; therefore we need approaches that acknowledge transgenerational patterns and relational dynamics that can work with families and networks to support all family members better. It is essential that these families' highly complex needs are to be met and the life chances of the children within them improved.

Many families in greatest need are the hardest to engage with professional support. Developing services so that they work with people's supportive relationships wherever they may be, inside or outside the home, is essential if vulnerable children and adults are to escape these cycles of damage and harm.

It would be good if we were to develop a project like REFRAME nationwide. A Conduct Disorder Outreach Team [Tier 3 CFCS/CAMHS] in Newham, London, works with 5- to 11-year-old children and their families at risk of social and educational exclusion. The team consists of family and systemic psychotherapists with the additional input of clinical and educational psychology. They have played a valuable role in the development and success of the team's work, not only for their skills in engaging and working with adults, children and adolescents but also for their skills in multi-disciplinary team management and supervision.

The team has found that parenting programmes alone will not impact children from families where there are severe, persistent and complex problems. These children and families need a multi-disciplinary input with intensive work involving the complex networks in which they are embedded.

**Q: How would AFT like to see the Department of Health better support the work of family and systemic psychotherapists?**

A: More integration with other professionals and less fragmentation with other professional bodies, which can be a source of enriching difference and diversity. We need a consultative and collaborative approach with the government, Unite, UKCP, AFT, other professional bodies and our families.

We are all in the same boat, working in the interests of families, improving their lives and helping them move from despair to recovery.

On a reflective note, from a wider political perspective we need to begin to understand and examine our own and others' religious and political influences.

How are we reflecting on issues such as institutional fear, race and structural inequality? There are many issues that need thinking about. What do we believe in respect of the influence on our therapeutic culture where we have assumptions and beliefs? How do we keep the balance between

commonality and difference? Maybe we need to start taking constructive risks in asking what it is that makes us feel we belong. How do we belong as families? As wives, as husbands, as brothers, as sisters, as grandparents...? The list goes on.

**Q: Are there any plans to grow and develop AFT?**

A: We are always mindful of developing as a profession involved in the media, research, public consultations, linking with other professional disciplines, with areas of special expertise and continual development. The government's White Paper on the review of statutory regulation will influence us professionally by involving AFT Registration Committee and PAC. We look forward to growing and developing our relationship with government departments and most of all our 'bread and butter' – our families – involving them more in AFT. Keeping up with changing times within the NHS and government projects is always a constructive challenge and is also stimulating.

**Q: How is being involved with Unite helpful for AFT?**

A: We need to retain our links with Unite as we have gained a great deal of support from our previous contact with Colin Adkins. He was extremely helpful to members who had difficulties with AfC and contributed invaluable advice when we produced the AFT/AMICUS A4C Guidance. We will continue to work alongside Unite, which can provide further advice on a professional basis to our members.

Also members have enjoyed the indemnity insurance Unite offers for our workforce. Unite can help with supporting our members in giving a voice to call on the government to rethink the Mental Health Bill and the White Paper on statutory regulation, and to facilitate opportunities for family and systemic psychotherapists and systemic practitioners. Unite could help in urging the DoH to support training and development for professional staff and trainee secondments, and influence and support equality within national recruitment and retention.

**Q: How can people get involved or make contact with the AFT?**

A: As our organisation is at the heart of psychotherapy development and influencing the future, we always welcome fresh initiatives and energy within AFT. We are under-represented and we would very much welcome those from other diverse groups. There are over 1,800 members of AFT. The membership is multi-disciplinary; it includes family therapists, teachers, social workers, psychologists, child and adult psychiatrists, occupational therapists, community psychiatric nurses, as well as those who train and manage these professions. Membership is open to anyone with an interest in family psychotherapy and systemic practice, and overseas members are welcome.

Those who want to be involved in AFT organisation can contact our office (see [www.aft.org.uk](http://www.aft.org.uk)).

It is essential to the functioning of our association to have interesting new challenges. ♦

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

For more information on the Association for Family Therapy, please visit: [www.aft.org.uk/](http://www.aft.org.uk/)

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