

Information for patients, families and carers

Clinical Health Psychology for people with heart problems

What is this leaflet about?

This leaflet explains how the Clinical Health Psychology service can help people with heart problems, for example heart attack, heart failure or angina. It explains what a psychologist is, what difficulties they can help with and what you can expect from a first appointment.

A health care professional such as a doctor, specialist nurse or physiotherapist may suggest you talk to a clinical psychologist specialising in cardiology.

What is a clinical psychologist?

Clinical psychologists are specifically trained in clinical psychology, undergo a minimum of six years' accredited training and are regulated by the Health and Care Professions Council. Unlike psychiatrists, clinical psychologists are not medically trained doctors and therefore do not give medical advice or prescribe medication; they use talking therapy instead.

What does a clinical psychologist specialising in heart problems do?

It is common for clinical psychologists to work in hospital settings to help people cope with and adjust to physical health difficulties, like heart problems. The clinical psychologist you see will have an understanding of the psychological effects that heart problems and its treatment can have.

Experiencing a heart attack, heart surgery or other cardiac difficulties can have a major impact upon people's everyday lives.

Although it is natural and understandable to feel distressed by having a heart problem, sometimes people with heart difficulties experience distress that would benefit from more specialist support than can be given by family, friends and other health care professionals. Talking with someone about how you are thinking and feeling is often the first step to identifying how things can change.

What sorts of difficulties can they help me with?

The service offers psychological assessment and intervention for people experiencing distress as a result of heart problems. It is natural for medical conditions and treatment to create changes that can be difficult to deal with.

You may be feeling anxious about what will happen, sad about things you can no longer do, or angry at what seems unfair. Often such feelings will ease, particularly as people become more confident over time.

Sharing these feelings with family and friends may be all that is required. However, some people have thoughts and feelings that are difficult to share with people they know, or they feel they are going over problems but not finding they feel any better. It is when this happens that a clinical psychology appointment may be useful.

The range of problems that can affect people may include but are not limited to:

- Changes in your day-to-day functioning
- Worry about heart problems returning or worsening
- Coping with treatment side effects
- Living with pace makers and implanted devices
- Coping with fatigue and breathlessness
- Changes in relationships
- Struggling to make lifestyle changes
- Living with an on-going heart problem

Who can use the service?

You can access the service if you are an adult who has been diagnosed with heart problems and you are under the care of the cardiology team at Royal Bolton Hospital.

If you are interested in accessing the service, you can discuss this with the cardiology team, who can refer you if appropriate. We are unable to accept self-referrals.

You will then be sent an opt-in letter, and once you confirm that you wish to attend, you will be offered an assessment appointment.

What will happen at my assessment appointment?

Appointments usually last 60 minutes and take place at Great Lever Health Centre, Bolton. An interpreter can be arranged by us for the appointment if needed.

The first appointment is an opportunity to discuss your health concerns and the impact of your health problem on your life and your emotions. You will also be asked to complete a questionnaire about how you feel. You will be asked what you would like help with and towards the end of the session a plan of what will happen next will be discussed.

There are various outcomes that may arise from your initial assessment appointment, for example you may agree to a further assessment session or be offered therapy sessions. Where adjusting to heart problems does not seem to be the main concern, we may discuss a referral on to a more appropriate service.

Can I bring someone with me to the first appointment?

You are welcome to bring someone with you to the first appointment. Bear in mind it will be important for you to feel able to discuss your difficulties openly. Your psychologist may suggest that you attend some or all further appointments on your own.

How many appointments will I have?

As each person is different, it is difficult to estimate how many appointments you will be offered with the psychologist. The number of appointments offered and how frequently therapy sessions occur will depend on their assessment of your needs. Some people see the clinical psychologist only once or twice, others may see them once a week or once a fortnight for several weeks or months. If you are offered therapy sessions, you will see the same psychologist at each session.

Are the appointments confidential?

Information that you share with the clinical psychologist is kept confidential and notes written in meetings will be kept separate from your medical notes. A summary letter of the assessment and intervention plan will be sent to you, as well as to the person who referred you and your GP.

Clinical psychologists work as part of a multi-disciplinary team and at times it may be necessary to share some information with other colleagues.

This will only happen if:

- Sharing information will improve the care you receive
- It is necessary to refer to another specialist
- There are circumstances involving risk of harm to you or another

The clinical psychologist will always try to discuss this with you before sharing information. If you have specific concerns about confidentiality, please let the psychologist know.

Do I have to see the psychologist?

No. Just because you have been referred to see a psychologist does not mean that you have to come. If you do attend, it is important that you are there because you want to be. Attending an assessment does not oblige you to commit to psychological therapy.

What is the next step?

If you would like to discuss a referral to a psychologist specialising in heart problems, please speak to your doctor, nurse or physiotherapist in the cardiology team.

If you have already been referred to the psychologist then you will be sent a letter asking you to telephone the service to opt-in to the waiting list. You will then be seen at the next available assessment clinic.

Contact us

01204 390045

If you require a copy of this leaflet in any other language or format, such as large print or audio, please contact **01204 390193**.

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