

Information for patients, families and carers

Clinical Health Psychology services for people with cancer

What is this leaflet about?

This leaflet explains how the Clinical Health Psychology service can help people with cancer. 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 oncologist may suggest you talk to a clinical psychologist specialising in cancer.

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 cancer do?

It is completely understandable to feel very distressed by a diagnosis of cancer, and sometimes a cancer experience can bring about difficulties or distress that require more specialist support than can be given by family, friends and other health care professionals. Clinical psychologists specialising in cancer can help people to cope with the difficult feelings that can be brought about by cancer and its treatment.

What sorts of problems can a clinical psychologist specialising in cancer help me with?

Some examples of what a clinical psychologist may help you with can include: feelings of depression or anxiety or anger; worry about the cancer progressing or returning; coping with treatment side effects like pain or fatigue; changes in your relationships after having cancer; coping with the uncertainty of having cancer; struggling to adjust or make sense of life after cancer; distressing or difficult memories of investigation/treatment; and changes in your self-esteem and body image.

What will happen at my first appointment?

You will be invited to meet with the psychologist for an assessment of the difficulties you are experiencing. This will usually take about 50 minutes. The purpose of the appointment is to explore whether clinical psychology services may be of help to you. During this appointment, the psychologist

will ask a number of questions about you and your life; not just about your health, because cancer affects the whole person.

Then together you and the psychologist will agree a plan. This may include supportive contact with your specialist nurse, further appointments with the psychologist, or you might decide another service may better meet your needs.

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 future appointments on your own.

How long is each appointment?

The first appointment will last about 50 minutes. If further appointments with the psychologist are arranged, these would also normally be for 50 minutes.

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 be decided between you and your psychologist.

Will I see the same psychologist at each appointment?

If you are offered therapy, then you will be seen by the same psychologist each time.

Are the appointments confidential?

What you and the psychologist talk about in the appointments is confidential, although it may be that some information needs to be shared with others involved in your care, such as your GP, oncologist, doctor or specialist nurse. If you have specific concerns about confidentiality, please let the psychologist know.

The psychologist may take notes during appointments, which would be kept in Clinical Health Psychology and not routinely shared with any other professionals. A summary letter of the assessment and therapy plan will be sent to you, the person who referred you and your GP.

Do I have to see the psychologist?

It is important to know that it is your choice to engage with psychology support. Just because you have

been referred to the clinical psychology service does not mean that you have to opt-in to the service or come for an assessment appointment. Just as attending an assessment does not mean you have to commit to psychological therapy.

What is the next step?

If you would like to discuss a referral to a psychologist specialising in cancer, please speak to your specialist nurse, oncologist or consultant.

If you have already been referred to the clinical psychology service, please contact us to opt-in to be seen, and you will be offered an appointment at the next available assessment clinic.

If you need to cancel or rearrange an appointment, please do let us know.

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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