

Pain Management Psychology Service

Psychological help with your pain

Why have I been referred to see a clinical health psychologist?

You will have been referred by one of the other health professionals working with you. This could have been one of the doctors in the pain management service, your GP, a physiotherapist or another member of the Pain Management Rehabilitation Team.

We know that living with long term pain can have a big impact on someone's mood and quality of life. It is common to feel low, frustrated and/or anxious and face a lot of losses in your life regarding what you cannot do now. We also recognise that the experience of pain can be influenced by many factors, including how people think, how they feel and what they do. There can sometimes be links to other things that have happened in the past too.

There is evidence that input from a psychologist can help people with this, to help people manage their pain better, and feel more in control of their lives.

It is important to note that seeing a psychologist does not mean the pain is 'in your head' or you are somehow 'making it up'. Your pain is real.

What will happen when I see a psychologist?

First Appointment

We meet everyone who is referred to our service for an initial one-off meeting.

This meeting will last for about one hour, and will help us to think together about your needs and what you want from your contact with us. At the end of this appointment we will make a decision together with you about what the *next steps* could be.

The next steps

- As a psychology service we offer a range of interventions. These can be 1:1 sessions, or group based.
- It may also be that other services elsewhere are actually better able to support a specific need you have. Where relevant we can also work with other services to support the pain aspect of your difficulties so that your treatment is more holistic.
- Or, it could be that this is the right place for you, but not now, and we ask your GP to consider re-referring you in the future.
- Or finally, it may be that you are doing well, and pain psychology is not what you need now.

We are part of a wider team here so often work alongside the other members of the Pain Management Rehabilitation Team (which includes specialist physiotherapists, occupational therapists, nurses and pain consultants).

What might pain psychology sessions explore?

If individual pain psychology sessions are the right option, we usually offer a small number of sessions which focus on helping people to live with and manage their pain as well as possible. Depending on what you need, this might include.

- Looking in more detail at the links between pain, how people with persistent pain feel and what they do. This includes recognising how all our human brains are designed to work and why they can be difficult to manage. This understanding can reduce feelings of being 'abnormal' and help someone to feel more empowered to make choices in how they manage emotions and pain.

- Exploring how the pain has affected someone's life (e.g. identity, self-esteem and self-confidence, relationships, working life) and how they might be able to get some of that back.
- Supporting someone with the changes/losses they have had to face as a consequence of persistent pain.
- Learning specific exercises and techniques to support effective pain self-management. For instance, learning relaxation as a practice may help reduce tension which often maintains pain and keeps us in a state of feeling 'under threat'.
- Considering how someone takes care of themselves. If, for example, someone has a stressful job or hectic home life, there may be very little time to take care of them themselves. Alternatively, someone could have become isolated and withdrawn from relationships. This can then lead to feeling low, anxious and un-confident.
- Investigating how someone could get the best balance between accepting help and support from other people (both professional and personal) and doing things themselves. There is lots of research that says that managing your own condition (with additional support as well) can be the best way forward.
- Many people referred to pain psychology have experienced significant stress or traumas in their life. Where appropriate, we sometimes offer some focused work to help reduce the distress associated with past experiences, as this can help people feel less overwhelmed by, and better able to manage, their persistent pain.

We work with you to decide together which of these are the most useful priorities to look at in the sessions you have with us.

Links to other services

Sometimes seeking help from other services or organisations might be the best option. This could be because other services have more expertise in a particular area, or based on location and accessibility of services. We would discuss this with you, and support you to access them, if we think another service could be helpful.

Confidentiality

It is very important to us that we respect the information you give us. Sometimes sharing information with other members of the pain management rehabilitation team and/or other organisations is really helpful, meaning that you don't have to keep repeating yourself and that your care can be better co-ordinated. We will discuss in our first consultation where your information is stored and what we would share, or might need to share with other professionals.

It is important to be aware that if we are worried that someone is at risk of harm then we might need to talk to other people (including other services/agencies). If that was the case, we would talk to you about it.

Attendance

As we are a busy service, it is important that you let us know if you wish to cancel or rearrange an appointment. Please give us as much notice as possible. We will try and support you to access the service, but may need to discharge you if you do not attend, or if you cancel multiple appointments.

What if there are any problems?

If things seem to be going wrong in your contact with the pain psychology service, please discuss it with your psychologist first. If this does not resolve the problem, a member of the team can let you know who else to raise this with, usually a more senior member of the service first, and then PALS if necessary. Our experience is that most problems can be resolved in this way.

If you have any questions or concerns before the meeting, please contact us on **01392 405019** or **01392 405018**.

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