



Gloucestershire Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Gloucestershire Long Covid Psychology Service

Introduction

This leaflet gives you information about the care available from the Long Covid Psychology Service. It explains the types of concerns we can help with and what to expect during your first appointment.

Why might I need to see a psychologist?

Living with a diagnosis of Long Covid can be difficult. People describe a range of emotional and psychological problems that can combine with and can be caused by the physical symptoms of the condition. Many people cope with the support of friends and family but sometimes it can be helpful to meet with a psychologist if the condition is having a big impact on you.

What difficulties can a psychologist help with?

There are a range of steps that people can take to reduce the impact of Long Covid symptoms. Some of these may have been suggested to you before. You may have also been pointed to services that can support you with this. For example, for people experiencing fatigue (tiredness) and post-exertional malaise (when your symptoms get much worse following minimal physical effort), it can be helpful to use an approach called 'pacing'.

Different people may need different types of help depending on how their symptoms show up. Most approaches such as pacing can be managed through

self-guidance or support from your GP, a physiotherapist, a social prescriber, a group programme, or peers. For many people it will not be necessary to see a psychologist.

Sometimes people can feel stuck even after trying new things. They are unsure how to move forward. A psychologist can help when living with Long Covid is causing a person to:

- Feel intense and overwhelming emotions such as anxiety, fear, depression or low mood, anger, shame, hopelessness, guilt, isolation and loneliness, disconnection.
- Have difficulties in relationships with loved-ones.
- Feel distant from what is valuable and meaningful in their life.

Who is the service for?

The service is for people over the age of 16 who live in Gloucestershire and have a diagnosis of Long Covid. The first step is an assessment with the Long Covid Assessment Service (GDOC). They will suggest the support they think will be most helpful. If the GDOC assessment shows that psychological intervention may be beneficial, you will be referred to the Long Covid Psychology Service. You will only be referred with your consent.

About the psychologist's role

Psychologists provide psychological approaches and talking therapy. They can help people find ways to understand and manage difficulties, to live well and improve their wellbeing at any stage of their treatment.

Psychologists have advanced training to use specialist assessment and therapy skills. They help people manage their problems but they are not medical doctors.

What to expect at your appointment?

The Long Covid Psychology Service is based at Beacon House, Gloucestershire Royal Hospital. Where possible we will try to meet with you in person. However, we are aware that your health may make it difficult for you to attend appointments in person. If this is the case, we can discuss arranging a telephone or video appointment.

At the first meeting we will try to understand your concerns better. We will do this by getting to know you and identifying your priorities. Your first appointment is usually arranged for about an hour.

During the meeting, we will discuss what might be helpful going forward, including whether more appointments would be appropriate. Some people see a psychologist only once or twice, while others may meet for six sessions.

It may be that at the first meeting you and the psychologist agree that this is not the right time for further psychology sessions, or that psychological input would be better accessed through a different service. If

this is the case, we will talk to you about the other options available.

After your appointment, the psychologist will usually write to you to provide a summary of the plan. With your consent, your GP will receive a copy of this letter.

If you need urgent help

We are not able to offer emergency help. If you feel you need urgent emotional or mental health support, for example if you are experiencing suicidal thoughts or are considering harming yourself, please contact your GP or:

The Crisis Team

Tel: 0800 169 0398

Samaritans

Tel: 116 123

If you feel that you are at immediate risk, call 999 or go to the nearest Accident & Emergency Department.

Contact information

If you have any questions or concerns about your care or this service, please contact your GP or a member of the Gloucestershire Long Covid Psychology Service.

Gloucestershire Long Covid Psychology Service

Tel: 0300 422 8523

Confidentiality

Information that you share with the clinical psychologist is confidential and notes from our meetings are kept separately from your general medical notes. If we plan to send a letter to any health professionals involved in your care, we will discuss this with you first.

We have a responsibility to tell someone if you are worried that you or someone else is at risk of coming to harm, although we would always try to discuss this with you first.

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Shared Decision Making

If you are asked to make a choice, you may have lots of questions that you want to ask. You may also want to talk over your options with your family or friends. It can help to write a list of the questions you want answered and take it to your appointment.

Ask 3 Questions

To begin with, try to make sure you get the answers to three key questions if you asked to make a choice about your healthcare.

1. What are my options?
2. What are the pros and cons of each option for me?
3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?



These resources have been adapted with kind permission from the MAGIC Programme, supported by the Health Foundation.

***Ask 3 Questions** is based on Shepherd HL, et al. Three questions that patients can ask to improve the quality of information physicians give about treatment options: A cross-over trial. Patient Education and Counselling, 2011;84: 379-85



<https://aqua.nhs.uk/resources/shared-decision-making-case-studies/>



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