

# Psychology Service for people affected by cancer

## Introduction

This leaflet has been developed by psychologists in the Trust who offer support to patients and their families who are coping with cancer. It is based on current evidence on helping people to cope and provides you with some introductory information.

## What is the psychology service?

The psychology service offers a range of emotional support to people who have experienced or are affected by cancer.

As part of this support, people can find it helpful to talk to a Clinical or Counselling Psychologist who specialises in how to cope with the stresses and strains of illnesses such as cancer.

## What is a clinical or counselling psychologist?

Psychologists spend a minimum of 6 years training before qualifying.

- We are trained to understand thoughts, emotions, behaviours and relationships
- We do not prescribe medicine or admit people into hospital. We are not the same as psychiatrists, who are medical doctors trained to treat mental illness.

## Why have this service?

Having a very serious illness can be difficult for anyone to cope with. You may find you can cope yourself, or with the help of family and friends, or maybe with the support of your health care team (such as nurses and doctors). Some particular problems may also benefit from the help of a psychologist.

For example some people might say:

- 'I just can't get my head around what's happened to me'
- 'Since my wife became ill, it's so hard to talk about the future'
- 'I'm finding it hard to cope with feeling so sad'
- 'I get so scared about going for appointments and treatment'

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- 'I feel like the rug's been pulled from under my feet'
- 'Everything's about the illness - I'm losing touch with who I am'.

Clinical and counselling psychologists are trained to help with these and other issues.

## **How a psychologist might help you?**

Psychologists use evidence-based psychological therapy which can help you to:

- Make more sense of the situation
- Consider the impact of the illness on yourself and those around you
- Look at how to harness your existing strengths in coping with things
- Develop new approaches to coping and to see how they work out in practice
- Work together to look at things from a different point of view
- Work on the best ways for you to communicate with the people around you
- Find ways of feeling more in control
- Deal better with distressing thoughts and feelings.

You will be working together with your psychologist on solving your problem; it is not simply a matter of them telling you what to do. You will need to be actively involved with whatever sort of therapy is recommended.

## **What will happen at an appointment?**

- You can be referred by anyone in your health or social care team, or you can contact us directly on the numbers at the back of this leaflet
- If you're not sure whether this is the right move for you, you could discuss it with a member of your care team, or ask to speak to one of us about it
- If you would like to go ahead, the psychologist will either send you an appointment letter or telephone you

- You will usually be seen at Gloucestershire Royal Hospital or Cheltenham General Hospital. Home visits or appointments in other settings can occasionally be arranged (where appropriate)
- Appointments can last up to an hour
- The main purpose of the first meeting is for you and the psychologist to identify what your needs are and to decide what kind of help will be of most use
- You are welcome to bring a family member or friend with you if you wish
- You may be seen for a number of follow up appointments; this will depend on the nature of your difficulties. When you are ready to be discharged, we will contact the person who referred you and your GP, who can re-refer you.

## **Risks**

Sometimes talking can make people aware of how distressed they are, which can be uncomfortable. Sometimes a talking approach is not for everyone.

## **Alternatives**

You may want to consult your GP who may recommend some other care, or prescribe medication, if this is needed.

## **Trainee clinical or counselling psychologists**

From time to time trainee clinical or counselling psychologists, who are on placement from postgraduate clinical or counselling psychology training courses, will be involved in your psychological care. This might mean you work with a trainee psychologist under the close supervision of a qualified psychologist. However, if you do not wish to be seen by a trainee, please say so. Be assured this will not affect your care in any way.

## **Will our discussions be confidential?**

- Yes. We do communicate our understanding of your problem to other professionals directly involved in helping you. However, you may be discussing very personal matters with us and we will respect a request not to pass on details, subject to the

requirements of the law: psychologists have to make a disclosure to the authorities if they hear about a serious criminal act or a serious child or adult safeguarding issue

- Your psychologist will take notes during or after your sessions; these are kept securely and confidentially. Psychology case notes are kept separately from general hospital medical records, but correspondence to your doctors will be filed within the general case notes.

## **Contact information**

### **Health Psychology Department**

Gloucestershire Royal Hospital

Tel: 0300 422 8523

Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 4:00pm

Telephone messages can also be left for the psychologists on the following numbers: (Please note that messages may not be picked up each working day)

### **Palliative Care Department**

Gloucestershire Royal Hospital

Tel: 0300 422 5179

### **Palliative Care Department**

Cheltenham General Hospital

Tel: 0300 422 3443

### **Haematological Cancers Psychology**

Tel: 0300 422 8117

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