

Your Guide to Having a Psychological Assessment

Introduction

Persistent pain (also sometimes called chronic pain) refers to pain that lasts beyond 3-6 months. Often persistent pain does not resolve with physical or medical treatment. Research indicates some form of persistent pain affects one third - half of all adults in the UK.

What is the Pain Management Service?

Pain management aims to improve your understanding of your pain and reduce the problems that pain can cause. The team is made up of psychologists, advanced practitioners, clinical pain specialist practitioners and nurse specialists who are all skilled in helping you to live better with your pain.

Why have I been referred to a pain psychologist?

Being referred to a pain psychologist does not mean that the team believe your pain is 'made up' or 'all in your head'. Your pain is real, and the psychologist aims to work with the psychological impact your pain is having on your life and to improve your wellbeing.

We know that living with persistent pain can be very difficult. It is normal for pain to have a significant impact on how you think and feel, or you may feel distressed by the way you act when you are in pain. Psychologists help you to understand your difficulties and to develop strategies with you to help you cope.

Working with a pain psychologist can help you to:

- Increase your understanding of pain and how it is processed in the brain.
- Develop strategies to enable you to more helpfully manage the distress caused by pain.
- Explore your values and develop goals to help you to reduce your focus on your pain and develop the areas of your life that are important to you.
- Change behaviours that may be getting you 'stuck' in a pain cycle.
- Manage the physical, social and psychological adjustments to your life from having persistent pain.

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What happens when I have been referred to a psychologist?

Once you have agreed an appointment time with our administrators, a psychologist from the pain team will call you on the number you have given us. This assessment lasts an hour, and the psychologist will ask you questions about your mood, your thoughts and how your pain is impacting your life. They may also ask you about your understanding of your pain, how you are currently managing your pain, any sources of support, your work, what's important to you and your history. Pain psychologists understand it can be difficult to talk about these things to someone you have not spoken to before, but they are highly skilled professionals who are there to help you to manage your distress.

At the end of the assessment, the psychologist will discuss their understanding of your difficulties with you, as well as possible options. You may be signposted to another service which will be better able to provide you with the help you require.

If you are offered short-term psychological therapy and decide this is not for you, your decision will in no way have a detrimental effect on the care you receive from the wider service.

Psychological Therapy

If you are offered talking therapy, this will involve attending regular (usually fortnightly) sessions with the psychologist, for up to 8 sessions with the aim of working towards your personalised goals identified in the assessment. These sessions last an hour and will be by telephone or video due to Covid19.

Your assessment letter will be sent to you which will summarise what you discussed, outline the goals for therapy you identified, the number of sessions and their frequency.

It is important to remember therapy is not a quick fix. Sometimes it can involve facing difficult thoughts and feelings, which may cause you initially to feel worse as you start to deal with these issues, with the long-term plan of feeling better.

It is very important to think about what support you have available and whether it is the right time for you to be accessing psychological therapy.

Therapy cannot be 'done' to a person. You will need to work in-between sessions on the tasks agreed with the psychologist.

Psychology appointments need to be regularly attended. You will be discharged if you are unable to attend regularly. Regular attendance is important to give the therapy the best chance of being helpful and effective. It is important that you consider whether or not you are able to commit to regular sessions.

What if I need to change or cancel the appointment?

Please contact the service on 0300 303 8063 Option 5, if you are not available for the appointment. Please tell us as soon as possible so that we can give your appointment to another patient and ensure we do not have wasted NHS appointments.

Confidentiality

We value your confidentiality. Our assessments begin with a discussion about confidentiality. It is your decision about the information you disclose to us. In line with NHS guidelines, we sometimes need to share information with other professionals involved in your care, this will be discussed with you at your assessment. It is a legal requirement for the service to record clinical notes and information. These are stored on a secure and protected clinical system.

The Persistent Pain Psychology Team

- Dr Catherine Cameron: Principal Clinical Psychologist
- Dr Claire Elphick: Principal Clinical Psychologist
- Dr Sarah Edwards: Senior Clinical Psychologist
- Dr Olivia Hirst: Senior Counselling Psychologist
- Dr Judith Bird: Clinical Psychologist
- Dr Kinza Janjua: Clinical Psychologist
- Trainee Clinical Psychologists who are on placement with the Service

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