

Pain Service

Clinical Psychology in Pain Service

Who is the leaflet for?

This leaflet is for patients who have been offered a consultation with a Clinical Psychologist in the Pain Service.

What is its aim?

The leaflet explains to you and your family the purpose of the clinic and what you might expect as the outcome.

What does a clinical psychologist do?

Clinical Psychologists help you to consider chronic pain in the context of your life. They work with you to understand and enhance the helpful ways you have of managing pain. The fact that you have been referred means that we do take your pain seriously. We believe your pain is real. There is no known cure for chronic pain. The paradox of chronic pain is that the normal responses to pain can help keep problems going. These may be areas to overcome as part managing chronic pain.

This view of chronic pain takes into account your experience as a whole person. The focus is on what you do already that are helpful skills to improve your well-being and quality of life for the long term.

How does a clinical psychologist help you?

The Clinical Psychologist in the pain service typically offers help with:

- Coming to terms with and adjustment to chronic pain and ill health.
- Improving your use of skills for self-management of chronic pain.
- Reducing distress related to pain and ill health.
- Improving your communication in relation to your chronic pain.
- Help with decision making about treatment to support your discussion with other health professionals.
- Life-style changes towards preventing deterioration of physical function and improving quality of life.

Patients experiencing chronic pain commonly suffer a range of difficulties. The problems chronic pain patients report that may be helped as part of a series of sessions, if these are planned, include:

- Health anxiety and other forms of anxiety
- Low mood
- Anger
- Low self-esteem
- Stress related problems

You will consider with the Clinical Psychologist your current ways of coping. It can be useful to look at how your pain can be affected by things that you have experienced in the past. However, the emphasis tends to be on putting your skills for self-management of chronic pain into action, consistently, in situations in the present. It may be that for some problems, support can be accessed from your GP or by referral to another specialist service.

What will happen at my initial appointment?

The Psychologist will work with you to form a shared understanding of the issues you need to cope with. This is likely to involve talking about the impact of pain on areas of life including work, leisure, social life and relationships with friends and family. For some patients, their basic needs are a priority to be addressed. For many patients, the focus is on factors that may be maintaining problems, working towards what you value in life and your realistic goals.

Following the initial appointment, usually a review appointment will be offered to you to cover any questions, to agree on an assessment letter and to come up with a plan. You may be recommended self-help information and be discharged if this is all that you require.

We will determine whether a psychology treatment is appropriate for you and if one is required, we will work with you to write a treatment plan with agreed realistic goals. Usually a cognitive behavioural approach is offered. This approach focuses on understanding chronic pain, recognising patterns in how you think, feel, what you do as part of your experience of chronic pain, and trying different ways of responding, where this is realistic and may be helpful.

Typically a series of six to twelve appointments of a duration of sixty minutes are agreed with the Clinical Psychologist. There is usually homework to complete, information to read between sessions and a plan is made towards discharge. In less complex situations, we may discuss a plan that involves up to four review appointments with agreed realistic goals. We combine this with telephone contact with your general practitioner to offer liaison and information about pain management skills. A further outcome may be to recommend referral to other specialist pain teams or services.

What is the training for a Clinical Psychologist?

As their minimum training, Clinical Psychologists complete a three year honours degree in psychology and an accredited postgraduate training course in clinical psychology. These courses have been at doctoral level since 1996. They have experience, knowledge and skills of working with a range of patient groups. They abide by the British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct and are registered with the Health Professions Council (the UK regulatory body for health professionals).

Benefits

Chronic pain can be viewed as a problem involving interactions of biological factors, behaviours, thoughts, feelings, social relationships and cultural factors. The clinic takes this perspective on a patient's chronic pain, to help them understand and self-manage the problem to the best of their ability. The aim is not to cure pain but to help patients resume everyday activities, feel better and make gains in what they can do. There is substantial research literature to support this understanding of the problem, and to suggest the benefits of a cognitive behavioural approach where appropriate, and multidimensional treatments for pain management.

Risks

There are no known frequently occurring risks associated with self-management skills and cognitive behavioural approaches for chronic pain. The clinic aims to meet the recommended benchmarks and be up to date on sufficient quality practice-based evidence. The clinic follows a standard assessment schedule to identify problems and as an aid to decisions on suitability. There is the potential to feel worse at stages during therapeutic interventions. The patient and therapist prepare for this in advance by reviewing the patient's ways of coping. Some patients decide to postpone sessions until they feel they can commit, in which case, brief input can be discussed with the patient that is individually tailored to their needs.

Alternatives

Should you require discussion on this or other options you can contact one of the clinic nurses, the Clinical Psychologist, or your general practitioner. You may wish to consider another option for accessing clinical psychology or counselling input via your general practitioner.

Contacts/Further information

Information and support is available from the charity 'Pain Concern':

www.painconcern.org.uk

Pain Concern, 1 Civic Square, Tranent, EH33 1LH, United Kingdom

Pain Concern helpline telephone: 0844 499 4676

Information on understanding chronic pain, how it can be treated and helpful strategies is available in the leaflet:

- 'Understanding and managing pain: information for patients'. British Pain Society. 2010. Available for patients at <http://www.britishpainsociety.org/>
- The leading mental health charity in the UK is Mind: www.mind.org.uk
- Mind, 15-19 Broadway, London, E15 4BO, United Kingdom
- Mind information line telephone: 0845 766 0163
- More information on cognitive behavioural therapy is available at www.babcp.com, the lead organisation for CBT in the UK.

- The professional body for psychologists in the UK is the British Psychological Society: www.bps.org.uk.

British Psychological Society, St Andrews House, 48 Princess Road East, Leicester, LE1 7DR, United Kingdom

British Psychological Society general enquiries telephone: 0116 254 9568

References/ Sources of evidence

A recommended book on chronic pain is: *Pain: the science of suffering (maps of the mind)*. Patrick Wall. 1999. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. London

Privacy & Dignity

If you have any concerns at any stage, please speak to the sister or clinical nurse specialist at the pain clinic.

The department of pain medicine is compliant with Trust policies for patient confidentiality. Sessions are confidential unless it is thought by the therapist that your own or another person's safety is at risk or if you wish members of the pain team to share your information. Clinical notes from sessions are kept separate from your medical notes. Your assessment letter is discussed with you before it is sent to your GP.

All therapists receive supervision of their work with clients to ensure patient safety, this is completed anonymously and is strictly confidential.

We continue to work on ways to improve the pain service. We would welcome your comments on your experience of clinical psychology as part of the pain service. We would also welcome your feedback on this leaflet. Should you like to comment please write to the pain clinic administrator, Department of Pain Medicine, Box 215, Addenbrooke's Hospital, Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 0QQ.



We are currently working towards a smoke-free site. Smoking is only permitted in the designated smoking areas.

For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS Stop Smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169

Help with this leaflet:



If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio format, please ask the department to contact Patient Information: 01223 216032 or

patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk



Document history

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