

Oncology

The Oncology Psychology Service

What is this leaflet about?

Cancer affects the whole person, not just the body. Cancer also affects the family, so it may be that you are the partner or carer or close family member of someone who has cancer. Your doctor or nurse or other health care professional may have referred you to our service because they feel you may benefit from talking to someone in confidence about the impact of your diagnosis and treatment on you and your family.

This leaflet explains the cancer or oncology psychology service: what we do, what difficulties we can help you with and how you can be referred into our service.

What do Psychologists do?

Psychology is the *science of human behaviour* --what makes people think and feel and behave the way they do. Clinical and Counselling Psychologists explore the way that somebody thinks and feels and behaves, especially when this causes them serious problems in their daily life. Psychologists not only work with people who have mental health problems; we also specialise in helping people cope with extraordinary circumstances or life events. In the field of cancer care, we specialise in helping people cope with and adjust to the emotional trauma and stresses that can accompany a serious physical illness like cancer.

How do Psychologists work with Cancer Patients?

The diagnosis of Cancer can be a traumatic event which can challenge the patient's most fundamental beliefs about life, themselves, and their future, and which may leave them feeling overwhelmed and powerless. The Cancer journey through treatment and beyond is a series of traumatic stresses and events, full of complex, unfamiliar and sometimes frightening information. Patients and their families face multiple challenges in the areas of resuming and maintaining life activities, coping with treatment and side-effects, managing the emotional impact and stresses and adjusting to significant long-term losses and changes. The complexity and severity of these challenges reflects the complexity and severity of the cancer, its treatment and the patient's personal life circumstances and challenges before cancer.



What kinds of issues can we help with?

People react differently to these stressful life events and need different levels of support. Often your family and friends, and other health professionals provide the support you need. But some people need more specialist help.

The Oncology Psychology Service provides a specialist level of support in helping patients and families cope with cancer, its treatments and its consequences. Some examples of the difficulties we can help with are:-

- Coping with a sense that the future is uncertain
- Coping with how cancer affects your relationships
- Managing the demands of home and family life while caring for yourself
- Strong emotions like feelings of depression, anxiety and anger
- Coping with adjustment, change, loss
- Coping with pain, discomfort, fatigue and treatment side effects
- Coping with how cancer affects sexual desire and functioning and intimacy
- Coping with how cancer affects your self-esteem and sense of self

This list is not exhaustive. Seeing a psychologist is just like seeing any other health professional. It is an opportunity to talk with someone trained in emotional and psychological well-being. It does *not* mean that you are weak or mentally ill. We will help you think about different and perhaps more effective ways of coping with your issues and concerns about having cancer.

Many people who have seen a psychologist say it is helpful to discuss their situation in confidence with someone outside of the family.

How do I get to see a Psychologist?

If you feel you are struggling to cope with anything related to your cancer, please let your doctor or nurse know. They can refer you into our service.

In addition to working with patients and their families, we also provide advice, support and training to other health care professionals working with cancer patients. We also supervise trainee clinical and counselling psychologists as part of their professional post graduate training and work experience.

What happens next?

If you decide to see a psychologist our first meeting is an opportunity for you to get to know one of us, to discuss the problems you would like help with, and to see if you would like to meet again. The appointment will usually last between 30 and 60 minutes. You can be seen by yourself, with your partner, or even with your whole family – the choice is yours. After the first meeting we will agree together whether to meet again, how often and for how many sessions.

Patient Information

On average we offer 6-8 sessions of talking therapy. Some people need more and some less. We offer appointments here at the University Hospital Coventry and Warwickshire. Our therapy room is located in the Arden Cancer centre; it is a non-medical room used solely for therapy.

Clinical and Counselling Psychologists are qualified psychologists who are registered with and regulated by the HCPC (Health Care Professions Council) as professionally competent practitioners. Psychologists are NOT medical doctors like Psychiatrists; we do not prescribe medication, and do not admit people into hospital.

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact 024 7696 5542 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy

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