

## Oncology

# The Oncology Psychology Service

## What is this leaflet about?

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.

Cancer affects you as a person, not just your body. Cancer also affects the people around you, so it may be that you are the partner, carer or close family member of someone who has cancer. Your doctor, nurse or other healthcare professional may talk to you about being referred to our service, if they feel you may benefit from talking to someone in confidence about the impact of your diagnosis and treatment on you and your family.

## Who works in our service and what do we do?

Psychologists and counsellors work in our service. Psychology is the *science* of *human behaviour* -- what makes people think and feel and behave the way they do.

Psychologists and counsellors explore the way that somebody thinks and feels and behaves, especially when this causes them serious problems in their daily life.

Psychologists and counsellors do not just work in mental health services, they also specialise in helping people cope with extraordinary circumstances or life events. In cancer care, our work focuses on helping people cope with and adjust to the emotional impact and stresses that can occur with a serious physical illness like cancer.

As well as working with patients and their families, we also provide advice, support and training to other cancer healthcare professionals.

## How do we work with someone who has Cancer?

Being diagnosed with cancer can be traumatic and can challenge the person's thoughts or beliefs about life, the world and their future. This can make them feel overwhelmed and powerless; for many people this gets less over time and with help from others.

Receiving a cancer diagnosis is an individual experience and everyone reacts



differently and needs different kinds of support. Most people get the support they need from their family, friends, doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals looking after them. Some people join patient led support groups or meet and bond with people who have had a similar experience.

Up to a quarter of patients may need more support and could benefit from seeing a cancer psychologist or counsellor.

Our service provides specialist support to help patients and families cope with cancer, its treatments and its consequences. Here are some examples of the difficulties we can help with (this list is not exhaustive):

- 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, tiredness 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

Seeing a psychologist or counsellor 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 or counsellor say it has been helpful to discuss their situation in confidence with someone independent.

## How can I be referred?

We see people at all stages of their cancer while they are under the care of the hospital: at diagnosis, during treatment or after treatment. If you feel you are struggling to cope with anything related to your cancer, please let your doctor or nurse know. They will talk to you about what your concerns are and think about what support is available, which may include a referral to our service.

## What happens next?

If you decide to see one of us, our first meeting is an opportunity to get to know each other, to discuss what you would like help with, and to see if you would like to meet again.

The appointment will usually last around 45 minutes. You can be seen by yourself, with your partner, or sometimes with family members – the choice is yours.

After the first meeting we will agree together whether to meet again, how often and for how many sessions. On average we offer 6-8 sessions of talking therapy. Some people need more and some less. We offer appointments here at the UHCW and our therapy room is located in the Arden Cancer Centre; it is a non-medical room used only by us.

## The impact of Covid-19 on our service:

Covid-19 has impacted the way we work, but we have worked hard to make sure we can see people face-to-face. This is because most of our patients have told us they prefer face-to-face appointments. However, sometimes we may have to offer you either a telephone or video appointment. Equally, if you do not feel comfortable coming to the hospital you can ask to have a telephone or video appointment.

## Further information:

**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.

**Counsellors** are accredited by the BACP (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy).

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact 024 7696 7517 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy

To give feedback on this leaflet please email [feedback@uhcw.nhs.uk](mailto:feedback@uhcw.nhs.uk)

### Document History

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