

# Specialist Palliative Care Psychology Service

## Introduction

This leaflet gives you information about the care available from the Specialist Palliative Care Psychology Service, what sorts of concerns we can help with and what to expect at a first appointment.

## Why might I need to see a psychologist?

It is not unusual to find it difficult to cope with a diagnosis of a life-limiting condition. People often describe the emotional and psychological side of dealing with cancer or another life-limiting condition as harder than dealing with the physical side. Many people cope with the support of friends and family around them, but sometimes it can be helpful to meet with a psychologist if your diagnosis or treatment is having a big impact on you.

## What difficulties can a psychologist help with?

Different ways of dealing with difficulties are helpful at different times. Sometimes the impact of what you have been through can be hardest to manage when treatment is coming to an end and for some people it is harder earlier on. Psychologists also work with people to help them think through decisions about their treatment or to cope with the side effects. Other concerns we can help with include:

- Anxiety, fears, panic and worry
- Coping with uncertainty
- Responses to traumatic experiences
- Depression or low mood
- Coping with fatigue, nausea, or cognitive changes
- Support with talking to children about a diagnosis
- Coping with end-of-life care issues

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Department

**Psychology**

Review due

**November 2027**

**Patient  
Information**

## Who is the service for?

The service is available to all patients who are under the care of the Specialist Community Palliative Care Team in Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

## About the psychologist's role

Psychologists are part of the clinical team working closely with the palliative care specialist nurses, doctors and other professionals. Psychologists offer psychological approaches and talking therapy to help people find ways to understand, manage difficulties, to live well and improve their wellbeing at any stage of their treatment.

Psychologists are trained to doctoral level to use specialist assessment and therapy skills to help people manage their difficulties but they are not medical doctors.

Psychiatrists are medical doctors who usually work with people with severe mental health needs and can prescribe medication.

## What to expect at your appointment?

At the first meeting we will try to understand your concerns better, start to get to know you and identify your priorities. Your first appointment is usually arranged for about an hour. During the meeting, we will discuss what might be helpful going forward, including whether more appointments would be appropriate. Some people see a psychologist only once or twice, or for example, others may meet fortnightly for 6 sessions.

You are welcome to bring a family member or loved one with you to the appointment, or you may prefer to be seen alone.

Appointments are held at either Cheltenham General Hospital or Gloucestershire Royal Hospital, depending on your preference.

For the first appointment at least, we prefer to see people face to face where possible, as that helps us get the best understanding of how things are for you.

We also offer video appointments if this makes attending easier for you. If neither face to face or video are possible, we can discuss a telephone appointment.

## Patient Information

You may be asked to complete some questionnaires – these help us to understand your concerns but if you need any help, we can complete them together during the appointment.

### **If you need urgent help**

We are not able to offer emergency help. If you feel you need urgent emotional or mental health support, for example if you are experiencing suicidal thoughts or are considering harming yourself, please contact your GP or:

#### **The Crisis Team**

Tel: 0800 169 0398

#### **Samaritans**

Tel: 116 123

If you feel that you are at immediate risk, call 999 or go to the nearest Accident & Emergency Department.

### **Alternative emotional support**

There are other charities locally such as Charlies, Maggie's (for cancer) and several hospices in Gloucestershire that offer different forms of support around emotional concerns if you feel these would be more appropriate.

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

### **Confidentiality**

Information that you share with the clinical psychologist is confidential and notes from our meetings are kept separately from your general medical notes.

However, as we work closely with the cancer teams, we usually feedback key themes of our work to the person who referred you or to your specialist nurse.

Please let your psychologist know if you do not want them to do this (we are happy not to). However, we have a responsibility to tell someone if you are worried that you or someone else is at risk of coming to harm, although we would always try to discuss this with you first.

## Patient Information

You will usually see the same qualified clinical or counselling psychologist throughout your care with this service. Occasionally we offer training placements – if you are offered an appointment with a trainee psychologist and would prefer to see a qualified member of the team, please let us know.

## Contact information

### Specialist Palliative Care Psychology Service

Tel: 0300 422 8523

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

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## Making a choice

### Shared Decision Making

If you are asked to make a choice, you may have lots of questions that you want to ask. You may also want to talk over your options with your family or friends. It can help to write a list of the questions you want answered and take it to your appointment.



### Ask 3 Questions

To begin with, try to make sure you get the answers to three key questions if you are asked to make a choice about your healthcare.

1. What are my options?
2. What are the pros and cons of each option for me?
3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?

These resources have been adapted with kind permission from the MAGIC Programme, supported by the Health Foundation

\* Ask 3 Questions is based on Shepherd HL, et al. Three questions that patients can ask to improve the quality of information physicians give about treatment options: A cross-over trial. Patient Education and Counselling, 2011;84: 379-85