

Cancer and Palliative Care Psychology Services

Introduction

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

It is not unusual to find it difficult to cope with a diagnosis of cancer or with another life-limiting condition. People often describe the emotional and psychological side of dealing with cancer 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.

The kind of difficulties we can 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 ends, sometimes it is harder earlier on. Psychologists also work with people to help think through decisions about treatment or to cope with the side effects. Other concerns we can help with include:

- Anxiety, panic and worry
- Fear of recurrence
- Responses to traumatic experiences
- Depression or low mood
- Body image concerns
- Coping with fatigue, nausea, or cognitive changes
- Support with talking to children about a diagnosis
- Psycho-sexual difficulties
- Coping with end-of-life care issues

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Department

Psychology

Review due

June 2025

**Patient
Information**

Who is the service for?

The service is available to all patients, at any stage of treatment for cancer, who are under the care of Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. We also work with people who are under the care of the Specialist Community Palliative Care Team.

About the psychologist's role

Psychologists are part of the clinical team and work closely with the specialist nurses, doctors and other cancer professionals. Psychologists offer psychological approaches and talking therapy to help people find ways to understand and manage difficulties, to live well and improve their wellbeing at any stage of their treatment. They are trained to doctoral level to use specialist assessment and therapy skills to help people manage their difficulties. Psychologists are not medical doctors.

Psychiatrists are medical doctors, who usually work with people with severe mental health needs and 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 what your priorities are. This meeting is usually arranged for about an hour. We will then discuss what might be helpful going forward, including whether more appointments would be appropriate. Some people see a psychologist only once or twice, others may meet fortnightly for 6 sessions, for example.

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.

Patient Information

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.

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 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 your specialist nurse.

**Patient
Information**

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.

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 clinical psychologist and would prefer to see a qualified member of staff, please let us know.

Contact information**Cancer and Palliative Care Psychology Services**

Gloucestershire Royal Hospital

Tel: 0300 422 8523

Cheltenham General Hospital

Tel: 0300 422 3443

Haematological Cancers Psychology

Tel: 0300 422 8523

All phone lines are open, Monday to Friday 8:30am to 4:00pm

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