



Clinical Psychology and Chronic Pain

You have been invited to attend a psychological assessment for pain management with a clinical psychologist. This document explains what a clinical psychologist is, and how they can assist people who live with long-term pain (also known as 'chronic' or persistent pain).

What is a clinical psychologist?

Psychology is the study of people: how they think, feel, act, react and interact. Clinical psychologists have training in using this knowledge to help people who have worries, difficulties or challenges in their lives. They often work with people who have physical health problems, because there is a strong link between mind and the body.

What is the role of a clinical psychologist in a pain service?

Living with chronic pain can affect many areas of a person's life, including family, relationships, work, social life, hobbies, and how the person feels about the world, the future and about themselves. For some people, it can lead to feelings of upset, anger, frustration, anxiety, distress, isolation, hopelessness or low mood. We also know that the stress caused by life events can make chronic pain feel worse, which in turn can make the pain more difficult to cope with.

Clinical psychologists help support people with the difficulties which can be caused by a pain and with the emotional and social aspects of living with a chronic pain condition. They work with people who have chronic pain to help them understand their condition and to develop more effective ways of coping with and managing their pain.

How can seeing a clinical psychologist help with chronic pain?

Seeing a clinical psychologist can help people accept and adjust to their pain as best they can. Clinical psychologists can also help people cope more adaptively with the life stresses which affect pain and which make it harder to manage.

A clinical psychologist can assist people with:

- Finding alternatives in the way they think, feel or act;
- Understanding and managing difficulties more effectively;
- Coming to terms with, and adjusting to having a chronic pain condition;
- Improving their use of standardised pain management strategies
- Reducing distress related to pain
- Improving communication in relation to pain;
- Life-style changes aimed at improving the person's quality of life.

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There are other reasons for seeing a clinical psychologist:

- If being assessed to attend the Pain Management Programme;
- If being assessed for the suitability for further medical interventions such as spinal cord stimulator or amputation.

What does seeing a clinical psychologist involve?

Clinical psychologists help people by using 'talking therapies'. They use specialist psychological knowledge and skills to help people understand the difficulties they face and to find ways of making adjustments in their lives.

The approach they use is collaborative – this means that you and the clinical psychologist work together to help identify ways forward. The clinical psychologist will not tell you what to do; instead they will help you to find your own answers and solutions to the challenges you face.

Clinical psychologists do not offer physical treatments or medication. Their focus is on helping people to develop strategies for adapting to and with their pain. It is not about finding a cure.

When you are referred to a clinical psychologist, they will offer you an assessment appointment, which can take up to one hour. This will involve discussing your pain and its impact on your overall well-being. At the end of the assessment, the clinical psychologist will discuss the options available and together you can decide the next step. This could include: individual sessions addressing the issues discussed in the assessment, group work, refer you to other professionals in the pain service, refer to other services outside of the pain team, or no further action.

You are more than welcome to have someone accompany you to the assessment.

Some myths about clinical psychology

Being offered an appointment with a clinical psychologist does NOT mean that people think:

- That your pain is not real;
- That the pain is 'in your head';
- That you are going 'mad'.

In fact it is a sign that the person who referred you understands how difficult it can be to live with chronic pain, and wants you to get the best support possible to help with all aspects of the condition.

Confidentiality and information sharing

Clinical psychologists will share only the information which is relevant to your care with other members of the pain management service. They will keep all other information confidential (private). Any reports or letters that are sent out will be with your consent and you will also receive a copy. The only time a psychologist would share information with other professionals whether or not you gave permission is if they were concerned that you or someone else was at a significant risk of harm. If this happened, they would discuss this with you first.

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Staff include:

Dr Tara Kipling, Clinical Psychologist

Chicky Fenning, Psychology Support Nurse

Occasionally the team are joined by Trainee Clinical Psychologists

If you would like to know more about clinical psychology and pain management:

You can find out more information on the British Psychological Society website, at www.bps.org.uk and the British Pain Society, at www.britishpainsociety.org