



Northumbria Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust

Pain Management Psychology Service

Issued by the Psychology Department



What is pain?

Pain is like a biological alarm system which is produced by different parts of your brain to warn you of danger. Persistent pain (pain lasting more than three months); can result in an oversensitive alarm system, and your brain can start to respond automatically to things, even when they do not necessarily mean danger. Pain doesn't always mean that there is damage to the body.

What is clinical health psychology in pain management?

When an individual has pain for a long time, it is likely that they will begin to experience other difficulties alongside this. The psychology service focuses on supporting people with the emotional impact of persistent pain. The primary focus of psychology intervention is about improving people's quality of life and helping them to live well with pain.

Does that mean pain is all in my head?

No, this does not mean that we think the pain is in your head or that it is not real. All pain is real, however pain is not produced by the body, pain is 100% produced by the brain. A psychologist will give you an opportunity to discuss your pain and how it affects you emotionally, your quality of life and the lives of those around you.

How can psychology help?

A psychologist cannot make your pain go away, instead we can help you to build an understanding of your difficulties and develop your coping skills and confidence. Although we will have some ideas to help you, psychology aims to help you find your own solutions to problems. This is done with discussion and thinking things through. The psychologist can offer some time and space for you to reflect on issues that are important to you.

Pain can affect areas of your life. However areas of your life can also affect your pain experience.



Goals for therapy vary according to each individual. They can include things like:

- Increasing an understanding of persistent pain and how it impacts on you.
- Reducing the intensity of low mood and depression related to persistent pain.
- Reducing the intensity of anger and anxiety about living with persistent pain.
- Supporting you in developing strategies in dealing with stress.
- Supporting you to increase your quality of life, despite pain, through reconnecting with values you find important.
- Teaching relaxation techniques to manage your pain.
- Supporting you in developing sleeping techniques.

What can I expect in my appointments?

Appointments usually last up to 50 minutes.

At your first appointment we will ask you some questions about how your persistent pain is affecting your life, your feelings and your current coping strategies. This is to try to understand and agree together possible ways to help you. It can sometimes take two or three appointments to complete an initial assessment.

When you have completed the assessment, we will discuss with you whether sessions with a psychologist could be helpful, how many sessions might benefit you and what the focus and goal of therapy might be.

Sometimes just one or two sessions can be enough for people to feel they have had what they needed. Other times we see people for 6-8 sessions and then review progress.

You will need to come to all sessions and commit to working on goals and strategies yourself between sessions, otherwise psychology could be of limited benefit.

Is it the right time for me to see a psychologist?

Below are some things to think about before you consider a referral to psychology:

- My difficulties are interfering with my well-being, and I feel ready to do something about them.
- I am keen to understand my pain experience, and develop ways to deal with pain.
- I want to develop goals which will improve my well-being and quality of life.
- I can commit to attending regular sessions.
- I am committed to working hard on the things I have learnt, in between my sessions.

Confidentiality

Most of what you discuss with us will be kept confidential. As we are part of the pain management team however, we ask permission to share important elements of our work together with other team members. This is to ensure you receive the best care.

We cannot keep it confidential if we think you or anyone else is at risk of harm. We explain this to you in more detail at your first session.

Letters

We will write a letter to your GP at the end of the initial assessment and again at the end of our time together, which will summarise some of the things, we have talked about. You are entitled to a copy of all letters concerning you. We will discuss this with you and you can tell us if you would like to receive copies of these letters at your first appointment.

Contact Details

If you need any further information please contact us:

Pain Management Team
Anaesthetics
Wansbeck General Hospital
Woodhorn Lane
Ashington
Northumberland
NE63 9JJ

Telephone: 01670 529540

Alternative Formats

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on **03 44 811 8118**

Other sources of information

NHS 111

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx

NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)

www.nice.org.uk

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Freephone: **0800 032 0202**

Text: 01670 511098

Email: northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk

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General Enquiries **03 44 811 8111**

www.northumbria.nhs.uk

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