Patient Information

Clinical Psychology in Palliative Care - Information on seeing a Clinical Psychologist working in the Addenbrooke’s Palliative Care Team

The Palliative Care Team is a multi-professional team. They can offer support, help, and advice aimed at meeting the individual needs of each patient referred to the service, and their family. Patients may see different team members such as a clinical nurse specialist, medical consultant or clinical psychologist. This leaflet gives a summary of what the clinical psychologist in the team can offer you.

Who are Clinical Psychologists?

Clinical psychologists are trained and professionally qualified to help people with a range of issues, particularly related to the consequences of medical conditions and treatments on an individual’s life.

They are not medically trained professionals and do not prescribe medications.
How might a Clinical Psychologist Help?
Research shows that medical conditions, their treatments, and their consequences on life, can be challenging.

A person may have already talked to health care professionals, family members, and friends about their illness and its impact on life. However, sometimes it can be difficult to share thoughts and feelings with them. This may be because the person does not want to worry others or take up their time.

The diagram below shows just some of the areas of a person’s life that can be affected by health conditions; the conditions do not just affect the body. The diagram also shows that each area interacts with the others.

Another example is being an inpatient in hospital. Hospitals are unusual environments and a person may find it hard to sleep because of noise, or they may feel embarrassed about relying on others to do their daily care.

A clinical psychologist can work with a person, their family, and their doctors, nurses and other healthcare providers to develop the person’s own strategies and resources, and perhaps find new ones to help manage the consequences of illnesses.

Some areas in which clinical psychologists have been found useful include:
- Managing symptoms alongside medical and nursing staff, such as pain, breathlessness, fatigue and treatment side-effects.
- Coping with changes and loss.
- Managing feelings of uncertainty, for example about the future.

Where will the Psychologist be seen?
- If a person is an inpatient, the clinical psychologist can see them at their bedside or, when available, in a private room.
- If the person is an outpatient, the clinical psychologist will arrange to see them in an outpatient clinic consulting room.

The length of the meeting will be guided by a person’s needs and wishes, but would not usually be more than an hour.

What will happen to the information shared with the Clinical Psychologist?
Clinical psychologists follow the same rules of confidentiality as all hospital staff. They are part of the clinical team and routinely communicate with doctors and other health professionals involved in a person’s care. If there are issues that a person wants to discuss with the clinical psychologist but does not want shared with others, they can ask that the information is not shared. There are occasions when information has to be shared with relevant professionals, such as when a person is believed to be at risk of harming themselves or another person.