

Sussex MSK Partnership Your Guide to being referred to Pain Psychology

Why have I been referred to a pain psychologist?

Being referred to a pain psychologist does not mean that the team believe your pain is 'made up' or 'all in your head'. Your pain is real, and the psychologist aims to work with the psychological impact your pain is having on your life and to improve your wellbeing.

We know that living with persistent pain can be very difficult. It is normal for pain to have a significant impact on how you think and feel, or you may feel distressed by the way you act when you are in pain. Psychologists help you to understand your difficulties and to develop strategies with you to help you cope.

Working with a pain psychologist can help you to:

- Increase your understanding of pain and how it is processed in the brain.
- Develop strategies to enable you to more helpfully manage the distress caused by pain.
- Explore your values and develop goals to help you to reduce your focus on your pain and develop the areas of your life that are important to you.
- Change behaviours that may be getting you 'stuck' in a pain cycle.
- Manage the physical, social and psychological adjustments to your life from having persistent pain.

What happens when I have been referred to a psychologist?

You will be contacted by the admin team to arrange your assessment appointment. For the assessment appointment it is preferred that this is a face to face appointment. You will be given options of venues to attend.

In exceptional circumstances, assessments can be arranged by video or telephone.

If it has been agreed your assessment will be by video or telephone please make sure you are available when the psychologist calls you. Make sure you are at home, in a private and confidential space and will not be interrupted during the assessment.

Your assessment will last up to 50 minutes. The psychologist will ask you questions about your mood, your thoughts and how your pain is impacting your life. They may also ask you about your understanding of your pain, how you are currently managing your pain, any sources of support, your work, what's important to you and your history.

Pain psychologists understand it can be difficult to talk about these things to someone you have not spoken to before, but they are highly skilled professionals who are there to help you to manage your distress.

At the end of your assessment, the psychologist will discuss their understanding of your difficulties with you, as well as possible treatment options.

You will receive an assessment letter, summarising what you discussed and outlining your ongoing care plan. This might include: -

Group Work

This will involve attending a group twice a week for either; an eight-session online pain management course via video (4 weeks), or a twelve-session in-person pain management programme (6 weeks). The aim of attending a group is to develop your understanding of your pain and to learn self-management strategies to help you to make changes to live more meaningfully with pain. The groups are facilitated by a psychologist and a physiotherapist. The groups provide opportunity to connect with other people living with persistent pain conditions.

Individual Psychological Therapy

If you are offered talking therapy, this will involve attending regular (usually fortnightly) sessions with the psychologist, with the aim of working towards your personalised goals identified in the assessment. These sessions will last up to 50 minutes. Your assessment letter will be sent to you which will summarise what you discussed, outline the goals for therapy you identified, the number of sessions and their frequency.

Signposting

You may be signposted to another service which will be better able to provide you with the help you require.

Discharge

Occasionally the psychologist may decide that a psychological approach is not suitable for you at this time and will discharge you. This may involve

signposting to organisations outside this service. They will discuss their reasons for this with you, and agree a plan with you.

What if I need to change or cancel the appointment?

Please contact the service on 0300 303 8063 option 5, if you are not available for the appointment. Please tell us as soon as possible so that we can give your appointment to another patient and ensure we do not have wasted NHS appointments.

Confidentiality

We value your confidentiality. Our assessments begin with a discussion about confidentiality. It is your decision about the information you disclose to us. In line with NHS guidelines, we sometimes need to share information with other professionals involved in your care; this will be discussed with you at your assessment. It is a legal requirement for the service to record clinical notes and information. These are stored on a secure and protected clinical system.