

## Clinical Health Psychology Persistent Pain Service

### How can psychologists help with managing my physical pain?

Psychologists specialise in understanding behaviour, thoughts and feelings. Chronic can influence our behaviour (we feel less able to do things), our thinking (we tend to have more negative thoughts) and feelings (we may feel low, anxious or angry). All those reactions are perfectly normal and common responses to experiencing pain, but can unfortunately also have a negative impact.

Psychologists are trained to work with complex issues like chronic pain by helping people to identify potential changes that can improve their ability to live well and reduce factors that contribute to pain.

### What is on offer (for more detail, look at later sections of the leaflet)?

- **Pain Information session:** 1-hr one-off session
- **Pain Management Group:** 3-hour sessions, weekly for 6 weeks
- **1:1 psychology sessions:** variable, weekly or fortnightly sessions

### Where are the sessions?

- Whittington Hospital (various sites: Education centre or Physio block)

### Who is the persistent pain psychology service for?

We can only see people experiencing persistent pain who have been assessed and referred by the Pain Consultant or pain physiotherapists at the Whittington Pain Clinic based in Whittington Hospital.

The service is generally recommended for people who have completed all their investigations into the medical cause of their pain.

### Pain Info Session

All new referrals are invited to a one-off hour-long session where members of our physiotherapy and psychology teams who specialise in pain management give information about what is available from the service, and talk through what might be the best option for you. After attending this session, we will make a date for a 1:1 assessment to understand if our programme is the right thing for you, and if now is the right time.

### Pain Management Programme

The most common intervention is our Pain Management Programme. The pain management group is run by two members of the Pain Management Team, usually from physiotherapy and psychology.

The group programme is partly an educational course on pain management, and partly an opportunity for people living with persistent pain to have positive discussions with other people who are living with persistent pain.

Although the idea of a group setting can perhaps be off-putting, most people who attend say that getting advice and support from others in a similar situation is really helpful and many build friendships while on the programme.

Sessions include confidential and positive discussions about how pain occurs, how pain affects your mind and body, how to manage stress, how to improve sleep, how to improve relationships and how to continue with things that matter to you (work or play).

There will also be some relaxation and mindfulness as well as gentle movement. We will look at practical strategies to help you increase your activities and stamina. You should wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothes when you come to the group so that you can do gentle movements.

Although the sessions are 3 hours long, they are very varied so that you do not have to sit or stand for long periods.

### 1:1 Psychology sessions

During the face-to-face sessions with a member of our psychology team, you will be able to talk about your worries and concerns about pain and develop ways of thinking about and responding to your pain that enable you to live a more fulfilling and meaningful life.

You will set realistic and relevant goals to work towards, and there will be an expectation to do tasks in between sessions to help you to achieve these goals. Due to limited service resources, 1:1 sessions would only be offered in exceptional circumstances.

## **What if my pain is so bad that I feel unable attend or I cannot attend for some other reason?**

We understand that pain can be unpredictable and can get in the way of many things, including attending appointments. To manage pain successfully we need to be willing to try new things and consider new perspectives, and if you are not able to attend, you will not be able to benefit.

If you cannot attend any of your appointments, for whatever reason, please let us know as soon as possible. If you miss appointments, we may need to close your referral, but we will aim to discuss this with you first.

If you are not able to attend either the first of the second session of the Pain Management Programme, you will have to start on another programme later, as you will have missed too much information to make good use of the rest of the programme.

## **Do I need to bring anything?**

If you need anything to enhance your vision or hearing (eg, glasses/ hearing aid), please bring that along. A willingness to learn and consider new ideas is also essential.

## **Why should I come to psychology group or 1:1 sessions?**

While attending these sessions, you will develop skills and knowledge that help you deal with and manage your pain, such as:

- learning the 'mechanics' of chronic pain and how it affects your nervous system

- understanding what it means to 'work with' your nervous system rather than 'fighting' your pain
- learning a new and different approach to managing pain that incorporates body, mind and environment
- understanding the psychological effects of pain and what to do about it
- learning new, evidence-based strategies that will allow you to manage daily life and increase your quality of life
- understanding flare-ups / increased periods of pain, what to do and how to reduce the frequency or intensity of flare-ups
- reducing isolation by attending a group with others who are also living with chronic pain

## **Will my pain go away if I attend sessions with the persistent pain psychology service?**

The aim of the service is to increase understanding about the causes of pain and how to deal with it. It also aims to help people make slow and steady improvements in doing things they need and want to do, and to reduce the emotional stress that can be associated with persistent pain. The hope is that by the time of discharge, people have more confidence, feel happier and more in control, and are on their way to being more flexible with increased stamina. To have long-term benefit you will need to attend regularly and continue with all the strategies you learn on the programme.

## **Will I be cured?**

Reduction in pain is highly variable (some people report reductions, others do not) but generally, people report increases in quality of life, despite

having chronic pain. Although many may still remain, people are more confident in managing their pain and feel more in control of their lives.

## **What support is available after the programme?**

Often people make friends in the group programme and create their own support network. We will provide you with a list of resources about support groups, activities in the community as well as literature and web-based resources.

THIS LEAFLET IS BASED ON GUIDANCE BY THE BRITISH PAIN SOCIETY'S 'Participant Information for Pain Management' Programmes' (2013).