

Patient information factsheet

Clinical psychology in the asthma service

As well as medical treatment, the asthma service at UHS can offer you the support of a clinical psychologist.

This factsheet will explain what psychology (the science of the mind and behaviour) has to do with asthma and explain what you can expect from an appointment with a psychologist.

What is a clinical psychologist?

- A clinical psychologist has trained in the NHS and is regulated by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).
- A psychologist is trained in how people think and feel.
- A psychologist helps people when they feel distressed, or when they are finding it difficult to cope.
- Psychologists do not prescribe medications; they talk to you about your condition and help you find ways to manage your symptoms.

What has psychology got to do with asthma?

We know that for many people, asthma is related to psychological wellbeing. The experience of everyday emotions such as stress, nervousness or excitement, as well as our thoughts, memories and some of the things we do can have a direct impact on our bodies and our breathing.

It can be very difficult for some people to come to terms with their asthma; for others, on-going difficulties make it hard to manage their asthma. For some people, distress can make physical difficulties much worse.

It can be helpful to learn more about these triggers for asthma and develop skills to manage them.

Is asthma “all in the mind”?

No. It is not the case that symptoms are “all in the mind”, physical symptoms are very real. Nowadays we know a lot more about how our minds and bodies are linked, and if emotions or thoughts may be making your symptoms worse, your psychologist may be able to suggest ways to help. There is no need to feel embarrassed about seeing a psychologist for this type of support.

Working together

Psychological input works best when psychologists and patients work together to achieve the patient's goal. You bring knowledge of your own experiences, whilst the psychologist brings knowledge of psychological theory and research. Your psychologist will use this information to develop a plan of how best to help.

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What happens at the appointment?

Usually the psychologist will meet with you for one or two assessment appointments which each last for about an hour. You will have the opportunity to talk about some of the things that are difficult for you, and think about the possible causes.

The psychologist will work through this with you and help you to think of some steps that could help. This may involve a talking therapy, practicing doing something differently, or you may be provided with information about other organisations that could help.

People who attend an appointment often describe being unsure about whether they want to come because they feel nervous about what it will involve. By the end of the first appointment, this feeling has usually moved to a sense that it has been good to talk openly in a confidential setting and people often describe feeling that "a weight has been lifted".

Do I have to attend?

It is entirely up to you whether you choose to attend an appointment with a psychologist, and your decision will in no way affect the care you receive from the asthma service in the future.

You can discuss a referral to clinical psychology with any member of the asthma team.

Further information

Health psychology

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