



University Hospitals Bristol **NHS**

NHS Foundation Trust

Patient Information Service  
**Psychological health services**

# Psychological support at the gynaecological cancer centre



Respecting everyone  
Embracing change  
Recognising success  
Working together  
**Our hospitals.**

  
**Above + Beyond**   
For Patients. For Health. For Bristol.



## **The psychological support we offer:**

We recognise that when a woman is diagnosed with a gynaecological cancer, her whole family may need to adjust their expectations, roles and daily lives. It takes time to make sense of what has happened and get used to new, and therefore sometimes worrying, experiences, including treatments. This process of change is almost always stressful, and distress can be a natural response.

As a team, we all aim to support our patients emotionally as well as physically. A clinical psychologist works as part of the team, and attends regular meetings in which the emotional, social and medical concerns for our patients are discussed. This is to make sure that we are providing the best holistic care for each individual patient and her own circumstances.

It is perfectly normal to experience stress, worry, frustration and sadness in coping with a diagnosis of cancer, and not everyone will need or want to see a psychologist. Sometimes, however, individuals or couples find it helpful to meet with the psychologist directly for some extra psychological support or advice. People often worry about their families and friends and want to protect them from their most difficult feelings. However, this can leave them having to manage their difficult feelings on their own. Having someone to talk to who is not a family member, and who understands the context of gynaecological cancer, can help.

## **What is a clinical psychologist?**

Psychology is the scientific study of people, the mind and behaviour. A clinical psychologist uses a research-based understanding of how people think, feel and behave in order to help people who are distressed. They have training in a variety of psychological approaches that can help when people are having difficult thoughts or feelings that are affecting their wellbeing and making it harder to do the things they need or want to do. The clinical psychologists working in our hospitals

specialise in helping people affected by physical problems or illness. They are all registered as qualified clinical psychologists with the Health Professions Council. Clinical psychologists do not prescribe medication (such as anti-depressants).

## **How can the clinical psychologist help me?**

Our clinical psychologist aims to help women, and those close to them, to adapt to the impact of gynaecological cancers. Talking with her can help with things such as:

- making sense of how you have been feeling
- finding ways to deal with feelings of anxiety, sadness, anger, guilt and loss
- adjusting to living with cancer, coming to terms with change and living with uncertainty
- making difficult decisions brought on by your illness or treatments
- learning ways to cope with, and prepare for tests, procedures and treatments (e.g. scans)
- finding ways to solve problems and make use of your own strengths and skills
- learning techniques, such as relaxation, that can make it easier to cope with pain and worry
- dealing with difficulties in your relationships or family dynamics as a result of your illness or treatment (e.g. sexual difficulties)
- moving forward with life after treatment has finished.

Everyone is different in the way they respond and adjust to diagnosis and how long this process takes. You may find that you feel it would be helpful to have support prior to treatment, during treatment or months afterwards. At different times, different issues may have the biggest impact upon you. This is perfectly normal and the psychologist is available to help you at any point.

## **How can I arrange to see the clinical psychologist?**

You can arrange to see the psychologist by asking any member of the gynaecological cancer team (such as a surgeon, doctor, nurse, or radiologist) to make a referral on your behalf.

## **What will happen at my first appointment?**

The clinical psychologist can see you individually or with partners or other family members, depending on what you prefer. If you are an outpatient, the psychologist will meet you in the clinical psychology room at St Michael's Hospital. If you are an inpatient, the psychologist will aim to visit you on the ward at a time that offers as much privacy as possible.

Every woman's situation is different and is assessed individually. The first meeting is an opportunity for you to discuss with the clinical psychologist what might be helpful for you, and your family, in managing any emotional or personal difficulties you may be experiencing as a result of cancer. This is likely to involve a detailed discussion about your present difficulties, including their effect on your daily life, how and when they arose, as well as considering aspects of your life before your diagnosis.

The clinical psychologist will work with you to reach an understanding of your problems and will discuss with you appropriate ways forward to reduce or resolve your difficulties. The appointment will last for about one hour. You do not need to bring anything with you to your appointments with the psychologist and there are no costs involved.

## **How long will I need to see the clinical psychologist for?**

Sometimes, it may be enough to meet with the psychologist once or twice for you to feel you can resolve the difficulty or find new ways of dealing with it. However, you may feel it

would be beneficial to meet regularly, say once a fortnight, with the clinical psychologist over a longer period of time. This will be negotiated with you when you meet with her and it will be reviewed regularly as you go along.

Ending treatment will be discussed with you and usually involves spacing out your appointments at longer intervals and/or arranging a follow up after a few months to check that your progress is continuing.

## **I have been given this guide but I'm not sure why**

If a member of the gynaecological cancer team has given you this leaflet, it does not mean that they think you are not coping or that you need help. It may be that they recognise that your situation is difficult, or that they simply wanted you to be aware that this service existed for future reference.

If it was suggested that you might want to meet with the psychologist, but you feel after reading this information that you do not want to have an appointment with her at this time, please tell the member of the team who gave you this leaflet. The decision to use psychological health services is entirely up to you and if you decide not to, it will not affect your healthcare in any way.

## **What happens to the information I share with the clinical psychologist?**

The clinical psychologist is part of your care team. This means that some information may be shared with other staff who are closely involved with your care, if it is appropriate and helpful to do so. If there is something that you tell the psychologist that you do not want her to share with anyone in the team, please let her know. She will always try to make sure that that information is then kept private, or confidential.

However, if there is reason to think that there is a risk of harm to you or others, this information may need to be passed on to other people. The psychologist will talk to you about this first whenever possible.

The psychologist will keep her own notes about any conversations she has with you, which are kept securely and confidentially within psychological health services. These notes are to help the psychologist remember the details of the concerns you have discussed with her and the plans she has agreed with you. She will write a brief letter to the people involved in your care following the initial assessment and also when treatment finishes, which are filed in both the psychology notes and your medical notes. If you have any concerns, or want to know more about the information that is likely to be shared about your care, please talk to the psychologist.

## **What if I am not satisfied with the service I receive?**

If you have concerns about the service you receive from the psychologist, please discuss them first with her or another member of the gynaecological cancer team. If this does not address your concerns, please contact the head of psychological health services, Sue Dolby. You can contact her by telephone on 0117 342 8168. You can also contact the patient support and complaints team on 0117 342 1050.

Please note that if for any reason you would value a second opinion concerning your diagnosis or treatment, you are entirely within your rights to request this.

The first step would usually be to discuss this with the doctor or other lead clinician who is responsible for your care.

Smoking is the primary cause of preventable illness and premature death. For support in stopping smoking contact **Smokefree Bristol** on **0117 922 2255**.

As well as providing clinical care, our Trust has an important role in research. This allows us to discover new and improved ways of treating patients.

While under our care, you may be invited to take part in research. To find out more please visit:  
**[www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/research-innovation](http://www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/research-innovation)**  
or call the research and innovation team on  
**0117 342 0233**.

For access to other patient leaflets and information please go to the following address:

**[www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/information-for-patients/](http://www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/information-for-patients/)**

**Hospital Switchboard: 0117 923 0000**

**Minicom: 0117 934 9869**

**[www.uhbristol.nhs.uk](http://www.uhbristol.nhs.uk)**



For an Interpreter or Signer please contact the telephone number on your appointment letter.



For this leaflet in Large Print, Braille, Audio, or Email, please call the Patient Information Service:  
**0117 342 3728 / 3725**

