Useful sources of information

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**Introduction**

The team in Oral Medicine includes oral medicine consultants, clinical fellows, clinical psychologists, specialist nurses and pain physiotherapists.

Chronic oro-facial (mouth and face) conditions arise from different systems interacting in the body. Our team works together to provide holistic treatment for all areas where your symptoms affect your well-being.

**Psychology in Oral Medicine**

The Psychology service in Oral Medicine is for people who experience high levels of distress or disability with their condition.

The Oral Medicine service clinical psychologists work with people to help them to reduce the physical and emotional impact of their pain or oral condition on their lives. This can help people to move forward and feel optimistic about the future.

Many patients’ first reaction to being referred to a psychologist is to worry the referrer thinks that their pain or symptoms are not real. In fact it shows that the referrer is aware of how difficult their condition can be to live with.

**How can a psychologist help?**

Pain and other symptoms can affect people in many ways, not just physically. They may worry about the symptoms they experience. Their symptoms may stop them doing certain activities such as eating in public, going out in cold weather or moving their jaw because they are worried about their pain or symptoms increasing.

Unfortunately, reducing normal movement can lead to weak muscles and stiff joints. This can make pain and symptoms worse.

People who have pain or other altered sensations may stop or reduce their work, social life or hobbies because the pain feels too much and they feel they can no longer manage these situations. This can lead to feelings of anger, frustration, low mood and low self-confidence.

**Assessment**

After referral, you will be seen individually for an assessment and this leaflet gives you information to prepare you for your appointment. You are welcome to bring someone with you if you wish.

At the assessment the psychologist will discuss your goals with you and work with you to decide the next step. This could be the Managing Oro-facial Pain programme, individual Acceptance and Commitment Therapy sessions or a referral elsewhere. A booklet is available if you would like further information about the Managing Pain programme.

**What does therapy involve?**

If you decide on individual psychology sessions we will discuss your goals with you and agree on the number of sessions. Each session lasts for 45 minutes. People have between two and eight sessions and these can be weekly, fortnightly or less frequent. It all depends on your needs.

**What is ACT?**

The psychologists use Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), which is related to Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). ACT includes acceptance and mindfulness skills along with encouraging behaviour that is open, aware and active to increase someone’s flexibility in the face of pain and other distressing symptoms.

Thoughts and beliefs about pain and symptoms can narrow our choice of coping responses available to us. Increasing psychological flexibility helps you to feel more confident in managing your pain; you may begin to experience improvements in your mood, social life, fitness and your ability to do activities despite your pain.

Depending on your goals, the sessions may include topics such as:

- understanding your condition
- the impact that thoughts have on mood and behaviour
- techniques to reduce the dominance and importance of unhelpful thoughts
- acceptance of unwanted feelings
- engaging in goal-directed action
- relaxation
- dealing with increases in pain / symptoms
- improving sleep
- communicating effectively with others about pain.

When working with a psychologist you will need to practise what you learn between each session. In general, the more you practise self-management strategies the more you will gain.

**Will this treatment work for me?**

Psychologists working with people with chronic conditions do not take away symptoms. We will help you to develop self-management strategies that reduce many of the effects of chronic pain.

Research shows that ACT for pain is very effective and has very good results in reducing the effect the pain has on people’s lives.
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**Oral Medicine Psychology Service**

**Information for patients**

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