

# The Dermatology Psychotherapy Service

Information for patients,  
families and carers

# What is psychotherapy and who is it for?

Psychotherapy is sometimes referred to as ‘the talking treatment’. It is a treatment for problems linked to your emotions.

Our service offers **psychodynamic psychotherapy**. This type of therapy explores how past experiences can unconsciously (without your awareness) influence your current emotions. It can help people who have emotional, relationship or family difficulties and may help if you have feelings of anxiety, depression, entrapment, isolation or meaninglessness. It can help you to think through difficult treatment decisions, like having surgery. It can also help if you are experiencing a crisis brought on by trauma or loss.

Psychotherapy is often offered along with other treatment methods, particularly where there are long-term problems. People often report that a combination of medical treatment and psychotherapy helps more than either treatment alone.

Sometimes the obvious ‘patient’ within a family – the person with a medical diagnosis – may not be the person most in need of emotional support. The psychotherapy service is also available to close relatives of our patients.

## Who provides the service?

This is a free service run by a psychotherapist within the dermatology department. Psychotherapists are trained healthcare professionals who help people to manage their emotional concerns over a specific period. They do

not prescribe medication or examine you physically, but work with other members of the dermatology team caring for you.

You may be referred to the psychotherapy service by a member of staff involved in your care if they think therapy may help you. You can also request a referral if you feel that you would like psychological support. If you would like more information, please speak to a member of the team caring for you.

## Why should I consider having psychotherapy for a skin condition?

Your skin is the largest organ of your body and the most visible. Therefore, skin diseases can significantly affect your quality of life.

You may:

- have developed ways of coping with your condition, but find that these no longer help you
- be finding other people's reactions difficult
- be coming to terms with a recent diagnosis
- be facing a progressive disease or end-of-life issues.

Some people prefer to cope with life events without professional help, but a wide range of people from all backgrounds can benefit from psychotherapy.

## How can therapy help?

Therapy allows you to reflect upon your experiences. It offers the chance to explore the things that matter to you, in a safe setting outside your usual circle of family, friends and colleagues. It is separate from your medical and nursing care.

Talking regularly with a psychotherapist about your thoughts and feelings allows you to address some of the difficulties you may be having. You may discover an underlying pattern to your difficulties and this can be worked through with your therapist.

Therapy can help you to develop a better understanding of yourself, how your past experiences may have led to current issues, and why these problems persist. This may widen the choices available to you, help you gain new perspectives on your situation and find better ways of dealing with your problems.

## **What can I expect during a therapy session?**

Your therapist will encourage you to talk about whatever comes to mind and to explore these things together.

Psychodynamic psychotherapy is usually non-directive, which means your therapist will not lead the sessions or offer advice. This may feel strange because you may be used to receiving guidance from other staff involved in your care. Also, your therapist will not discuss any personal information about themselves. This may make the therapist seem cold and unfriendly, especially in the early stages of your therapy. However, this approach can allow you to discover your most important issues and feelings, and can open the way to change.

Therapy can be a stressful process, as it often involves re-living your previous and current difficulties. Because of this, it can stir up intense feelings and painful memories.

Your anxieties and other symptoms may become more intense during your therapy, especially at the beginning. This may make you feel as if the therapy is making things worse and you may be tempted to quit. However, if you discuss these feelings with your therapist, we hope you will find that therapy helps you in the long term. Many patients feel they are more able to lead fulfilling lives after therapy, even if their medical condition is limiting.

## **What if this skin condition is life-threatening?**

Some skin conditions may reduce the length of your life as well as its quality. Many people fear death above all things and the issues that arise can be extremely difficult to discuss, particularly with the people you love most.

If you would like, the therapist can help you to think about important conversations or decisions. Sometimes, discussing things like your response to approaching death, and your feelings towards those you will leave behind, can make talking to family members easier. Being able to talk to those you love and not feeling alone are helpful at any time, but especially when you are coming towards the end of your life.

Relatives who are busy caring for their loved ones may not realise how greatly they have been affected until after the person has passed away. If support is needed, we can offer sessions following bereavement to family members and carers.

## Confidentiality

Broadly, your meetings with your therapist are private and confidential. This means that your therapist will not discuss information about you with other people.

However, if the therapist is concerned for your safety, he or she may feel that it is necessary to involve other people in your care. This is very rare and your therapist will make every effort to discuss this with you first.

Sometimes your therapist may need to discuss your care in general terms with other members of the clinical team.

If you are happy for us to do so, we will usually let your GP know that you are having psychotherapy, and tell them when it ends.

## Your appointment

You will be offered an initial meeting to find out whether the therapist feels you would benefit from psychotherapy. If the therapist believes it may help you, he/she will arrange a series of appointments with you. If our service is not appropriate, the therapist will speak to you about any available alternatives that could help.

Sessions usually last for 50 minutes. They take place in the same room at St. Thomas' Hospital and at regular times. The therapist will talk to you about how many appointments you will need. Some people find they need as few as six sessions, whilst others may need considerably more. We ask that you make every effort to attend your appointments, as you are likely to make more progress with regular sessions.

If you have an inpatient stay here during your treatment, drop-in sessions may be arranged so that your therapy is not interrupted.

Sometimes it may be helpful if your partner or another member of your family attends the therapy session with you. If you feel this might help you, please do say so. It can be useful to be able to discuss family matters in the presence of an objective person outside your family circle, although everyone will feel differently about this.

## **Cancelling an appointment or your therapy**

If you wish to stop your therapy, please discuss this with your therapist. We prefer to have one month's notice so that the ending can be planned.

Your therapist will speak to you about arrangements for illness, cancellation and holidays at your first appointment.

**If you are unable to attend an appointment, please contact your therapist on 020 7188 7841. Please do not use the main hospital appointments number, as psychotherapy sessions are managed directly between you and your therapist.**

We hope that the information contained in this leaflet has been helpful and we welcome your suggestions about how to improve it.

## Contact details

If you have any questions or concerns about your appointment or any of the topics discussed in this leaflet, please contact Katharine Moss (Psychoanalytic Psychotherapist) on telephone number **020 7188 7841** or via email on **katharine.moss@gstt.nhs.uk**.

## Useful information

### Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

**t:** 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust's services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:

**t:** 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas' **t:** 020 7188 8803 at Guy's **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

### Language support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.

**t:** 020 7188 8815 **fax:** 020 7188 5953

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