

# Hepatology service

**We specialise in the care and management of patients with disorders of the liver, biliary tract and pancreas. This leaflet will help you use the appropriate services, and make sure you are given the best advice and support we can offer.**

## What type of diseases do we treat?

### Liver

The liver is a vital organ in the body that performs over 500 functions. It processes digested food and removes harmful substances from the body. Your liver can be damaged by things such as a viral infection, regularly drinking too much alcohol, and being overweight. More rare factors that can cause liver damage include abnormalities of the immune system, cancer, and gene changes running within families. If liver damage is left untreated, it can cause scarring of the liver (cirrhosis). In most liver diseases, treatment at an early stage can stop the condition getting worse.

### Bile ducts

These are thin tubes that connect the liver and the gallbladder to the small bowel. They carry bile, a fluid made in the liver that helps digest food in the bowel. A variety of diseases can affect the bile ducts. They can be blocked, most commonly by gallstones. Blockage can also be caused by cancer or narrowings (strictures). Bile ducts can be also affected by abnormalities of the immune system, causing inflammation.

### Pancreas

This is an organ that produces enzymes that help digest food, and hormones that regulate sugar levels in the blood. Inflammation of the pancreas (pancreatitis) can be caused by gallstones or by drinking too much alcohol. The pancreas is rarely affected by abnormalities of the immune system, gene changes or cancer.

## What does our service offer?

We assess and treat patients with diseases of the liver, bile ducts and pancreas.

Your assessment will include blood tests and a scan (usually an ultrasound scan). Some patients may need more specialised scans, such as a CT or MRI scan, to assess their disease more accurately. Most patients with liver diseases will have a FibroScan®, a simple non-invasive test, similar to an ultrasound, to assess changes in your liver. Some patients with liver diseases may need a liver biopsy, when a very small sample of liver tissue is taken with a needle that is inserted into the liver. The sample is then examined, and helps assess the cause and the severity of the liver damage.

Not all patients need specific treatment for their disease. For many of the diseases that we treat, lifestyle changes, such as losing weight and avoiding alcohol, can stop the disease from getting worse. Some patients may need medicines to treat their disease. Rarely more invasive procedures may be needed, such as an endoscopy, when a small camera is inserted into the bile ducts or the pancreas. We also offer specialised endoscopic therapy (insertion of a balloon in the stomach) for selected patients with obesity and fatty liver.

## Who are the members of our team?

Our team includes consultant hepatologists, specialist nurses and pharmacists. Clinical fellows and specialist trainees routinely support our services. We all work as a team, and regularly discuss complex cases in our meetings to make sure we collectively make the best decisions for your care.

We work together with other professionals and teams, such as the alcohol care team for patients with alcohol problems, and the obesity services for patients with fatty liver. We refer patients who may need more specialised treatment or liver transplantation to King's College Hospital liver transplant centre.

## What should you expect at your appointment?

When you come to your appointment, you might be seen by one of the doctors, a specialist nurse or a pharmacist. At your first appointment you will be seen by a doctor in a consultant-led clinic or a specialist nurse in the one-stop nurse-led clinic. They will do an assessment, and discuss with you in detail any more tests you may need, and treatment options for your condition. You will be also given information about your disease.

At your follow-up appointment you may be seen by a doctor, a specialist nurse or a pharmacist. If your doctor has put you on medication for your disease, you may be seen in a pharmacy clinic. Our pharmacists will give you all the necessary information about your medication, provide prescriptions and do the necessary monitoring.

We have a range of leaflets in our clinics that can help you understand more about your disease, tests and treatment you may need. Please ask your doctor, specialist nurse or pharmacist for more information.

Clinics take place at either St Thomas' or Guy's Hospital. Some clinics are in the form of a telephone consultation so you will not need to come to the hospital. Please read your letter carefully for the details of your appointment.

## What happens if you need a blood test?

If we ask you to have a blood test before your next appointment, there are walk-in blood test clinics at:

**St Thomas' Hospital**, Blood Test Centre, South Wing, Ground floor, Monday to Friday, 7.30am-5.45pm

**Guy's Hospital**, Outpatient Department, Southwark Wing, 2nd Floor, Monday and Wednesday, 8.30am-12.30pm

No paper form is needed as the blood test has been requested electronically.

## Who can you contact if you have a question about your disease?

If you have any questions or concerns about your liver disease, please email or call our Liver Helpline, **e:** [LiverHelpline@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:LiverHelpline@gstt.nhs.uk), **t:** 020 7188 2492, Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm. We aim to respond to queries within 24-48 hours.

For medical emergencies, contact your GP or go to your nearest Emergency Department (A&E).

## Who can you contact if you have questions about your medication?

If you have any questions or concerns about your liver medicines, please contact our Pharmacy Helpline, **e:** [gastropharmacist@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:gastropharmacist@gstt.nhs.uk)

If you run out of medication before your next clinic appointment, we also have a walk-in pharmacy clinic on Thursday, 1-4.30pm in Gassiot House at St Thomas' Hospital. Please come to the reception at Gassiot House between 1-2pm to secure a walk-in slot (two slots are available at each clinic). You may need to wait until booked patients have been seen.

### Contact us

If you have any questions about your appointment (including cancelling or re-scheduling), please contact the relevant department:

#### Outpatient appointments

**t:** 020 7188 2492, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

**e:** [gst-tr.GastroenterologyOfficeStaff@nhs.net](mailto:gst-tr.GastroenterologyOfficeStaff@nhs.net)

#### Radiology (ultrasound, CT, and MRI scans) at Guy's and St Thomas' Hospitals

**t:** 020 7188 5542, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

#### FibroScan®

**t:** 020 7188 2492, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

#### Endoscopy

**t:** 020 7188 8887, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

#### Liver biopsy

**t:** 020 7188 5573, for Guy's Hospital, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

**t:** 020 7188 5477, for St Thomas' Hospital, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

#### Alan Apley ward

**t:** 020 7188 8861 (for patients with ascites who need regular fluid drain (paracentesis))

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit **w:** [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets)

Leaflet number: 5022/VER1

Date published: July 2020

Review date: July 2023

© 2020 Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust

A list of sources is available on request