Health psychology service for patients with sickle cell disease and thalassaemia

This leaflet gives information about the health psychology service, and how we can help you. If you have any questions, please speak to someone caring for you.
What is the health psychology service?
We give free psychological support to patients (over the age of 16) with blood disorders and their families, at Guy’s and St Thomas’ Hospitals. We are an accessible service that takes a patient-centred approach. We see inpatients and outpatients, and offer individual face-to-face and virtual (telephone and video) psychological therapy sessions, group therapy and support, and cognitive assessments. We also work with other healthcare professionals to support them in providing psychologically informed medical care.

How the service can help you
Seeing a psychologist is a normal part of your care, just like seeing any other healthcare professional. People experience different emotions at various points in their care when faced with health problems. It can present stressful challenges, and can affect people in many different ways.

At times it can be useful to talk to a psychologist about the impact illness and treatment can have on your quality of life, ways of coping, and thoughts and feelings, including:

- understanding and adjusting to changing health issues and treatments
- support with making decisions about your treatment options
- coping with difficult feelings, such as stress, anxiety, low mood, uncertainty
- adjusting to being in hospital or having to come into hospital frequently
• coping with symptoms, for example, pain, fatigue, sexual concerns
• managing the impact of health challenges on your relationships
• building your self-confidence and self-esteem
• dealing with the impact of your condition on employment and education
• getting the most out of your interactions with healthcare professionals
• adjusting to memory and concentration problems associated with your condition or treatment
• managing specific fears, for example, fear of needles or blood transfusions.

How the service works
You can be referred to us by asking one of your nurses or doctors, contacting us directly by phone, email, or in person (details at the end of this leaflet). Once we receive a referral, we try to offer a first appointment as quickly as possible. The waiting time will depend on the demand on our service.

What if you need to be seen urgently?
We are not an emergency service. If you feel you need urgent medical or emotional support, please go to your nearest 24-hour Emergency Department (A&E). For 24-hour emotional support, please call the South London and Maudsley Hospital 24-hour mental health support line, t: 0800 731 2864, or Samaritans, t: 116 123. Please also visit your GP, who may be able to refer you elsewhere for more urgent psychological support.
**Where will your appointment be?**
Appointments in person will be in the Haematology Department 2, 4th Floor, Southwark Wing, Guy's Hospital.

We may also offer you virtual (telephone or video) appointments. This would be in agreement with your allocated psychologist.

**Can your family or carers be seen?**
We are aware that health challenges can also have an impact on relatives and carers. We can see patients with a partner, relative or carer, and see partners, relatives or carers on their own (if preferred) for some short-term individual support that relates to the patient’s health condition.

**Your first appointment**
Your first appointment can take up to 1 hour and are mostly between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday. This will be a chance to discuss your concerns and what support might be suitable for you. We will decide together if psychological support sessions are likely to be helpful, or if another service might be better for you.

**How we can help**
**Psychological therapy**
We use various talking therapies, such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), compassion focused therapy (CFT), and mindfulness to help you cope with the impact your blood condition may have on you and your family. We **do not** prescribe medication.
We can offer you up to 10 individual psychological therapy sessions lasting 50 minutes. We may invite you to a follow-up ‘review and booster’ appointment 6 months after your therapy sessions are complete if we agree this could be helpful. You can stop seeing the psychologist at any time you like, but we hope this will be when you feel able to manage your concerns better.

**Therapeutic groups/workshops**
We offer face-to-face and virtual groups and workshops on specific themes such as sleep, developing self-compassion, and resilience. Please contact us to find out which groups are currently running.

**Cognitive assessment**
Some patients experience changes in their cognitive abilities as a result of their health condition. A cognitive assessment can identify changes in your abilities such as memory, concentration and problem solving. It shows what your strengths and limitations are, so we can work with you to find ways for you to cope. This can help you in your everyday activities, working life or studies. If you are interested in finding out more, please ask us about this.

**Drop in support group**
The sickle cell ‘face to face’ or ‘virtual video’ support group provides a safe space where anyone affected by sickle cell disease can meet, share information, ask questions and connect to one another. The group is facilitated by one of the haematology team psychologists. All patients, relatives and friends are welcome to attend. To find out the current meeting details, please contact us, **t: 020 7188 2718**, **e: HPS@gstt.nhs.uk.**
Confidentiality and privacy
All information you share during our sessions is private and confidential, however it may be beneficial to you if we share some information with the team caring for you. This will be done with your permission. In exceptional circumstances, such as if there is a risk to you or others, we may have to pass on information you have given, without your consent, to make sure that you get the support that you need.

We may ask your permission for a psychology student to observe your session. If you choose not to agree to this, your decisions will always be respected and your care will not be affected in any way.

Cancelling appointments
If you cannot come to an appointment, please telephone us, t: 020 7188 2718. Please let us know with at least 24 hours’ notice, so that we can give the appointment to someone else. If you cancel or do not come to multiple appointments, you may be discharged from the service. A new referral would be needed for you to access psychology again.

What else do psychologists do?
We also offer consultation, supervision and training to other health professionals, and do research and audits for the service’s development. We liaise with the multidisciplinary team to make sure that psychological care is incorporated into patients’ medical care plans.
Useful sources of information

Sickle Cell Society
A charity that supports people living with sickle cell disease, and works to raise awareness about the condition, **t:** 020 8961 7795, **e:** info@sicklecellsociety.org **w:** https://www.sicklecellsociety.org/

UK Thalassaemia Society
A charity that aims to educate the public and improve treatment for people living with thalassaemia, **t:** 020 8882 0011, **e:** info@ukts.org **w:** https://ukts.org/

South Thames Sickle Cell and Thalassaemia Network (STSTN)
A collaboration of healthcare professionals working with people with sickle cell disease and thalassaemia to improve the patient experience, **t:** 020 3299 5102, **e:** info@ststn.co.uk **w:** www.ststn.co.uk/

Guy’s and St Thomas’ welfare support advisor
Our welfare support advisor specialises in supporting patients living with sickle cell disease or thalassemia, **t:** 020 3049 5993, **e:** gst-tr.referralsto-sicklewelfare@nhs.net

Samaritans
A charity dedicated to reducing feelings of isolation and disconnection that can lead to suicide. They are contactable by phone, email, SMS, letter and face-to-face through their local branches, **t:** 116 123 (24-hour service, 365 days a year), **e:** jo@samaritans.org **w:** www.samaritans.org
**Shout 85258**  
A UK crisis text service available for people feeling they need immediate support. By texting, you will be put in touch with a trained Crisis volunteer who will talk via text, **t**: 85258 (24-hour service, 365 days a year), **e**: info@giveusashout.org  
**w**: www.giveusashout.org

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**Contact us**  
Haematology psychology service, **t**: 020 7188 2718,  
**e**: HPS@gstt.nhs.uk

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

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**Pharmacy Medicines Helpline**  
If you have any questions or about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline, **t**: 020 7188 8748, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

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**Your comments and concerns**  
For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.  
PALS **t**: 020 7188 8801, **e**: pals@gstt.nhs.uk  
Complaints, **t**: 020 7188 3514, **e**: complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

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**Language and accessible support services**  
If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch.  
**t**: 020 7188 8815  
**e**: languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

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