A Health Psychology Service is provided to individuals who are suffering from physical health problems that may be having an impact on their mood and / or quality of life.

We all know that emotional problems, stress, or lifestyle, can make us physically unwell. If we already have an illness, stress can make it worse. The Psychologist can then help people in addition to any medical treatment or investigations they are already receiving.

**Why have I been referred to a Psychologist?**

You may be concerned that your doctor has referred you, “do they think I’m mad or making it up!” This is a common misunderstanding, because Psychology sounds a bit like Psychiatry. A psychiatrist is a trained medical practitioner who can prescribe medication. They focus on the biological factors affecting mood. On the other hand a Psychologist deals with everyday problems that can affect anyone. Referral to a Psychologist happens when somebody has a physical problem, but where medical treatment may not be the whole answer.

**What does a Health Psychologist do?**

Clinical and Counselling Psychologists have undergone lengthy training in assessment and treatment of psychological problems, arising as a result of distressing life experiences. Despite all of their training, they are only doing their jobs properly if they are down to earth and approachable. It is true that they can offer, if appropriate, a wide range of therapies such as counselling /psychotherapy, cognitive behaviour therapy and hypnosis, however usually their most important role is to help the person understand their symptoms more clearly and to learn practical strategies which can help them cope more effectively with their illness.

**What does psychological therapy involve?**

Your first appointment will involve a comprehensive assessment of your health problems and the ways in which they affect your day-to-day life. In particular, attention will be paid to the way in which your thinking might be affecting your mood, your motivation and confidence. Sometimes an assessment and practical advice is all that is needed for the person to feel that they can manage better. If treatment is considered likely to be helpful, this will involve identifying specific problems and learning ways to look at them differently. In this way, you may find ways of dealing with your health problems more constructively.

Everyone is different in how they experience their symptoms and treatment is tailored specifically to suit your particular situation. Therapy is collaborative; the length of treatment is variable and may range from one or two sessions up to eight or more sessions. Complex problems may require further treatment sessions. You would always see the same therapist unless there are exceptional circumstances. The effectiveness of any intervention is regularly reviewed so that both you and your Psychologist have a clear idea of your progress.
What kinds of health problems respond to psychological treatment?

Psychological factors may influence a wide range of health problems. It is not a matter of a problem being either psychological or physical, but rather the interaction of the different factors. Very often a vicious cycle develops, so that our physical health problems affect our mood, which further affects the way we deal with our symptoms.

Health problems we frequently treat or assess include:

- Diabetes
- Chronic pain
- Cardiac symptoms
- Respiratory problems
- Cancer
- Gastrointestinal problems
- Chronic fatigue
- Eating disorders
- Headache and migraine
- Stroke and neurological disorders
- Obstetrics
- Gynaecological and fertility problems

What about confidentiality?

The Psychologist will take notes during the assessment and any subsequent sessions. These notes are confidential and are kept securely within the department. They are not shown to other professionals. It is standard practice for the Psychologist to write back to the professional who originally referred you, with a summary of the assessment and a description of the treatment plan you have made. A copy of this report is usually sent to your General Practitioner and where appropriate, to other medical professionals within the hospital who are interested in your care. You have the right to a copy of letters if you so wish; you have the right to access your health records under the Access to Health Records Act 1990.

What about quality of care?

Periodically we have Assistant Psychologists or Clinical / Counselling Psychologists in training working in the department. They have first degrees in Psychology and trainees are attending one of the local Doctoral courses in Clinical or Counselling Psychology. All work by assistants and trainees is supervised by the qualified staff. You have the right to choose whether or not to be involved in their training.

In addition you have the right to a second opinion. If this is not available within the department a referral will be made to another trust.

If you would like further information regarding the Health Psychology Service, please contact our department.
Our offices are located at:

The Department of Clinical Psychology
Escomb Road Annexe
Bishop Auckland General Hospital
Escomb Road
Bishop Auckland
DL14 6AD

and

The Department of Clinical Psychology
Darlington Memorial Hospital
Hollyhurst Road
Darlington
DL3 6HX

By phone: 01388 455755

Clinical Psychology Secretary

At times when no one is in the office, an answer phone is in use. Please leave a message for any member of the team and we will return your call as quickly as possible.