



The
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Health Psychology in the NHS: A guide for employees

Working with a Health Psychologist?

Working in the NHS means you are likely to work alongside professionals with a variety of qualifications and with a range of job titles, some of which you may not have encountered before. A Psychologist or more specifically, a 'Health Psychologist' might be one such title.

This leaflet is for people who would like to know more about the role of a Health Psychologist. It is designed to explain the variety of work Health Psychologists may do and how they can support the work and clinical care carried out by a variety of healthcare professionals.

What is a Health Psychologist?

Health Psychologists are experts in applying psychological knowledge, research and interventions to promote and improve health and the health care system and to inform health policy. They work with patients, carers/family, healthy community members and health care professionals, in groups, with individuals and with organisations.

What areas are their skills used in?

Health Psychologists work in a wide range of areas relating to health, illness, and health care. These include:

- **Health promotion and behaviour change:** promoting health by applying evidence based interventions for primary prevention of illness or disease, for example sexual health.
- **Health service improvement:** improving effectiveness of health care systems for instance increasing uptake of service use, for example cervical screening.
- **Chronic illness/condition management:** helping people to deal more effectively with illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes and cancer and includes helping them to deal with normal emotional reactions to illness. This can improve their quality of life.
- **Expert advice or consultancy:** helping health professionals and patients, for example gathering evidence to improve services such as pain management.
- **Research:** Health Psychologists have advanced skills in a variety of research methods, which enables them to conduct research, provide expert advice or collaborate on a study, for example studying the links between stress and health.
- **Teaching and communication:** for example training health professionals on how to deliver an intervention to help promote healthy eating, or training in communication skills such as how to break bad news.

What type of roles do Health Psychologists already hold in the NHS?

These are some examples of the types of positions held by Health Psychologists within the NHS.

Consultant Health Psychologist: taking a lead for health psychology within public health, including managing tobacco control and cessation services and providing professional leadership in the management of Health Trainers.

Alternatively, leading the health psychology service within one of the UK's leading heart and lung hospitals, providing a clinical service to patients and advising all members of the multidisciplinary team.

Chartered Health Psychologist: providing health psychology input to a centre for pain medicine, planning and co-facilitating a group pain management programme and advising on complementary therapeutic approaches.

Research Psychologist: carrying out health psychology research, for example exploring the psychological impact of receiving a diagnosis of dementia, or evaluating ways of providing psychological support for people with burn injuries.

Health Psychologist in Training: assessing patients, delivering psychological interventions to change health behaviours and conducting research, whilst being supervised by a Chartered Health Psychologist.

What training does a Health Psychologist receive?

Health Psychologists are chartered by the British Psychological Society (www.bps.org.uk).

Chartered Health Psychologists will have undertaken a minimum of six years of training and will have specialised in health psychology for a minimum of three years. Once chartered, Health Psychologists can work in a range of settings for example the NHS, universities, research and charitable organisations.

A Health Psychologist in training might be working within the NHS whilst working towards chartered status.

A Chartered Health Psychologist will have demonstrated competencies in all of the areas below:

- Professional skills (include implementing ethical and legal standards, communication and team work).
- Research skills (include designing, conducting and analysing psychological research in numerous areas).
- Consultancy skills (include planning and evaluation).
- Teaching and training skills (include knowledge of designing and delivering large and small scale training programmes).
- Specialisations such as delivery and evaluation of behaviour change interventions.

Where can I find out more?

To find out more about Health Psychology and its applications within the NHS please visit the British Psychological Society Division of Health Psychology website www.health-psychology.org.uk.