

# The red cell psychology service

**This leaflet is for patients with sickle cell disease (SCD) and thalassaemia who would like to know more about clinical psychology in the red cell service.**

## What is a clinical psychologist?

Clinical psychologists specialise in helping people who are experiencing emotions that they find difficult, such as feeling stressed, worried or low in mood. In the red cell service, we specialise in helping people cope with stresses and difficulties related to SCD or thalassaemia.

We work in health settings but we are not medical doctors so we do not prescribe any medication.

## Why might I want to see a psychologist?

SCD or thalassaemia can have a major impact on people's lives. For this reason it is not unusual to have emotional difficulties such as increased worry or frustration. Some of the most common problems that people talk to us about are:

- Worries about their health and their future
- Fear or anxiety about medical procedures such as, transfusions or operations, or when they are finding it difficult to make decisions about treatments
- Feeling overwhelmed by their condition and finding it difficult to cope. This can sometimes be linked with feeling low in mood and struggling with motivation or relationships with others.
- Feeling stressed, anxious, angry or sad about what is happening to them and feeling hopeless about the future

We also have a specialist service for pain management for people with sickle cell disease and thalassaemia. This includes a clinical psychologist, a physiotherapist and a medical pain specialist. For more information see the 'Red Cell Pain Management Service' leaflet or discuss with a member of the team

Pain, low mood and worry all make SCD and thalassaemia feel more difficult to deal with. Speaking to a psychologist offers you an opportunity to discuss this with someone non-judgemental who is trained and experienced in supporting people with these difficulties.

## What happens next?

If you would like to be referred to psychology, you can contact us directly or speak to your haematologist or specialist nurse, on the ward or in the community, about referring you to our service.

Once we receive the referral, we will contact you by phone or letter to arrange an assessment. In this assessment we will ask you some questions about the things that are difficult for you right now, what your life is like and some background details. We will then think with you about what

you would like to change, what work we could do together and whether it is the right time for you to attend psychology sessions.

If psychological support in the red cell service would be helpful, we will arrange a series of appointments to start working towards your goals using psychological approaches. For psychological support to be useful, you have to commit to coming regularly to sessions and you may find that you feel worse before you feel better, so it is important for you to consider whether this is the right time for you to have these sessions. If you do not feel that it is the right time to start sessions, you are welcome to be re-referred to the service at a future time when it might be more helpful. We might also decide together that a different service is more appropriate for your needs, as this service is only for problems directly related to sickle cell disease and thalassaemia. We can support you with thinking about where it might be helpful to have another service and make onwards referrals. The decision to engage (or not) with psychology will not impact on any other support you receive from the haematology team.

## **Will my information be kept confidential?**

Any notes taken by the psychologist during your appointments will be kept separate from your medical notes. However, we work as a team with the haematology nurses and doctors, and so sometimes will share certain information with them so as to improve your care. Please discuss with us if there is information that you would like us to keep private. However, sometimes we may have to share information without your agreement, with other professionals such as medics or police, for example, if we were worried that you were a risk to yourself or someone else.

At certain time points we will want to write summaries about our work together. This would usually happen after assessment and when we have completed our sessions. We will send these summaries to your haematologist and to your GP, as well as a copy to you. You can request that certain information not be shared with your GP.

We understand that confidentiality is very important and can be something that causes apprehension, so please do talk to us if you have any concerns or questions about this.

## **Contact us**

If you would like to speak to us about psychology in the red cell service or would like to refer yourself, please contact:

Dr Alexa Duff or Dr Jenna Love  
Clinical psychologists  
0779 858 1198  
020 8725 0885 (haematology secretary)  
SCDpain@stgeorges.nhs.uk

Please note that this is not an urgent care service and this number will only be answered during normal working hours. If you wish to speak to someone urgently, please contact your GP or local A&E.

## **Useful sources of information**

### **UK thalassaemia society**

**Website:** <http://www.ukts.org/>

### **The sickle cell society**

**Tel:** 020 8961 7795 / 020 8961 8346

**Email:** [info@sicklecellsociety.org](mailto:info@sicklecellsociety.org)  
**Website:** <http://www.sicklecellsociety.org/>

### **Samaritans**

**Tel:** 116 123

**Email:** [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

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

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## **Additional services**

### **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing (near the lift foyer).

**Tel:** 020 8725 2453 **Email:** [pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk)

### **NHS Choices**

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

**Web:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

### **NHS 111**

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

**Tel:** 111



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