



Patient Information

Critical Care Psychology Service

For patients and families who have attended the Intensive Care Unit or High Dependency Unit

Common emotional reactions to attending intensive care

Any visit to the intensive care unit can bring up a variety of very difficult feelings. These feelings may vary greatly from person to person and may change over time although it is very common for people to experience anxiety, low mood, anger or a loss of confidence whilst in hospital. Sleep difficulties, nightmares, hallucinations and delirium are also often experienced whilst in intensive care and people can feel traumatised and uncertain about what the future might hold after this period of acute illness.

After people leave hospital it may take some time for them to adjust, both in terms of their physical recovery and their emotional well-being. Visitors who witness their relative or friend in intensive care also often feel all of the above reactions and they too may need time and support to adjust to this frightening and threatening event.

Why are people referred to a Clinical Psychologist?

Having a variety of unpleasant emotions and worries is entirely normal and to be expected when people are admitted to hospital and face serious and life threatening health problems.

However, sometimes people may feel overwhelmed by these experiences and unable to cope with them alone or with family/friends. Our hospital team aims to support people as much as possible with any psychological, emotional or social concerns they may have, but sometimes it can be helpful to access support from someone trained specifically in managing emotional pain.

People might access specialist psychological support to discuss emotional distress related to being in hospital or experiencing traumatic medical events. People may also talk about how they can adjust to a new diagnosis and manage the impacts of a long-term health condition.



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What can a Clinical Psychologist do to help me?

Clinical psychologists are 'talking therapists' who aim to support people to improve their overall wellbeing and quality of life when they are facing physical or emotional challenges. They work together with people to understand the difficulties present in their lives and to find ways of coping with emotional distress and physical health problems so that these challenges begin to feel more manageable. All clinical psychologists have completed at least six years of specialised training and are registered with the Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC).

How do I get referred to see a Clinical Psychologist?

If you have any questions or are interested in seeing our Clinical Psychologist please discuss this with one of your nurses or consultants at Great Western Hospital. Your hospital team may suggest to you that a referral to psychology might be helpful but a referral will only be made if you give your consent.

You can contact the Critical Care Psychologist on 01793 605641. There is a voicemail facility on this number, please leave us a message and we will return your call on our next working day. Alternatively the main hospital switchboard can direct your call to the Intensive Care Unit.

What happens at your first appointment?

You will be invited to have an informal discussion about your experience of ICU / HDU and any current challenges in your life, for example your physical health, relationships, work, daily routines & sleep. You will then decide whether additional psychology sessions would be helpful to you and what you might like to use this time for. This might include working on understanding and changing a particular difficulty in your life or having a space to talk and process recent events. Appointments typically last for an hour and the number and frequency of appointments can vary depending on your needs and commitments.

Please note that there may be a short wait before a psychology appointment can be offered. If you feel you require urgent emotional or mental health support, for example, if you are experiencing suicidal thoughts or are considering harming yourself or someone else, be aware that you can contact:

- **Your GP**
- **NHS 111**
- **Emergency services 999 or A&E**
- **Samaritans 116 123**

This information sheet is available to order in other languages and formats. If you would like a copy, please contact us on 01793 604031 or email qwh.pals@nhs.net

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