

# The Psychotherapy Assessment Process

Regional Department of  
Psychotherapy

Patient Information Leaflet

Shining a light on the future



## **Introduction**

This aim of this leaflet is to provide information about the Assessment Process at the Regional Department of Psychotherapy. If you are not sure about anything in this leaflet please ask a member of staff.

## **What is psychoanalytic psychotherapy?**

There are many different types of therapy, based on different traditions and schools of thought. Benfield House specialises in psychoanalytic psychotherapy.

Psychoanalytic psychotherapy is a type of therapy which aims to help identify your problem, to understand its underlying meaning, how it has come about and to work it through.

Your problem could involve a range of difficulties, such as

- symptoms
- feelings
- behaviours and relationship difficulties

The therapy involves talking as openly as possible to the therapist, working together to try and understand the problem and looking at any difficulties that arise in your relationship with the therapist. This process helps to increase your understanding of yourself, helping you to see how your problems interfere with how you relate to others.

Psychoanalytic psychotherapy originates in the work of Sigmund Freud and the developments of later psychoanalysts working in this tradition.

Psychoanalytic psychotherapy has been adapted from this and applied to work within the NHS.

## **What are the basic principles of psychoanalytic psychotherapy?**

- All psychiatric symptoms have a meaning, in terms of the life of the person experiencing them.
- Mental health difficulties and symptoms are linked to the presence of emotional conflicts between different parts of the personality. These conflicts and difficulties are linked both to inborn biological factors, like temperament, and to actual experience, particularly early experience and relationships.
- These conflicts are often unconscious, and are played out in relations between different parts of the self, and in relation to other people, and the world more generally – sometimes including the system of care.

## **What are the aims of psychoanalytic psychotherapy?**

- The aim of psychotherapy is to create a setting where difficulties can be relived and better understood, so that there becomes more choice and flexibility in the person's life. The aim is not considered to be complete "cure", which is not realistic, or removal of painful emotion and conflict, which are part of life, but increased self knowledge, and a degree of change.

- Change does not come easily. Though there might be a conscious striving to do things differently, there are often other parts of the personality working against, and resisting this change. Psychoanalytic psychotherapy is an attempt to provide a setting where intellectual understanding and emotional experience can come together, in a way that can help the person move on with their life.

## **Psychotherapy assessment**

Everyone seen in the department will first be offered an assessment, usually with a senior psychotherapist.

### **What is a psychotherapy assessment?**

There are two main aims of the assessment.

- The first is to allow a space where difficulties can be expressed, clarified and better understood. We regard the assessment itself as a treatment intervention, and it is hoped that it will be helpful in itself, whether or not it leads to longer term psychotherapy.
- Secondly the assessment also allows you to get a sense of what this type of psychotherapy might be like, and whether it feels right for you. It also allows time for the therapist to get a sense of whether longer term psychotherapy is likely to be helpful to you, or not.

### **What happens in an assessment?**

- The way we work is likely to be different from other professionals you may have seen. When you come into the session the psychotherapist will normally wait for you to start the session with whatever you want to talk about. Sometimes people get very anxious about what they “should” say. One of the very few basic instructions of this type of psychotherapy is that of encouraging you to, as far as possible, say what comes to your mind and to try to avoid trying too hard to prepare, control and order this in advance.
- In the assessment the psychotherapist may ask more direct questions, than in long term treatment. These would normally include; what are your problems from your perspective? What is the history of these difficulties and why are you coming for help at this point? Are there some current or recent factors/events that might have made things worse? What do you hope to get from psychotherapy, and what has been your experience of any psychological and/or psychiatric help you have had, or are having?
- The psychotherapist will also normally seek to obtain a personal history, including family background, school, work, relationships, and so on. This helps to provide a context in which current difficulties might be better understood.
- The “dynamics” between yourself and the psychotherapist may also be clarified, explored and interpreted. This is because what you may be feeling in relation to the psychotherapist may echo how you might feel in other situations in your life and in past relationships. The therapist may not immediately answer a question, or offer reassurance/guidance if this is requested. This is to better allow the key difficulties to emerge, where they can be experienced, and better understood in the “here and now” of the assessment setting.

- If these feelings can be experienced, and thought about, and links made to other situations, past and present, then there can be an opportunity for understanding and learning, and modifying patterns of behaviour.
- The assessment will also be a chance for you to ask about and clarify the nature of the treatments offered at Benfield House, and what this might mean for you. An extended assessment, which allows presenting problems to be explored in depth, and gives you an experience of what longer term individual psychotherapy might be like, may involve up to 6 sessions.

### **Communication with third parties**

During the time that you are in an assessment, there are various ways that communication is shared with third parties. These include;

- An electronic record of the assessment session and any relevant information about you arising in the assessment process, which other clinicians will need to access. This information is accessible only to clinicians working with you and who are employed by the Trust. For example, your CPN, or Psychiatrist or Care Coordinator. This record enables up to date communication to take place between professionals involved in the system of care. Personal information that is not relevant for others to know will be held in confidence between you and the therapist undertaking your assessment. You can discuss confidentiality and the limits of it with the psychotherapist seeing you in your assessment.
- At times there can be a need for contact with other third parties external to the Trust (e.g. crisis services, social services or your GP), usually where there is a concern about risk, either to you or to a vulnerable adult or child.
- There will be an assessment report which will be sent in confidence to your GP, referrer, and any other health professional actively involved in your care. This will include your presenting problems, personal history, a clinical formulation and treatment recommendations.

### **Risk management**

- On occasions you may feel overwhelmed by the feelings stirred up by the assessment process and this can result in a risk of harm to you and possibly others. Should this be the case, you will be encouraged to return and to talk about your experiences we will try to help you understand what has happened. The aim is to develop a capacity to bear feelings, put words to them and in understanding their origins, reduce risk over time.
- However, in some situations where risk increases or if you are in an acute crisis, we may need to involve other agencies to provide more immediate support. We will discuss this with you and would hope that the assessment process will continue.
- It is important to note that this is not a common occurrence and will be negotiated on an individual basis as and when required.

## Your responsibilities

If you need to cancel an appointment please let us know as soon as possible, so that the appointment can be offered to another patient. If you miss one appointment and ask for a rescheduling this will be promptly made by telephone and letter. However if you miss two consecutive appointments this will usually lead to discharge from the service, unless there is a clear clinical reason for your non attendance.

## The outcome of the assessment

- Sometimes an extended assessment is helpful in itself and there is no requirement for further treatment at the present time.
- Sometimes, following the assessment, further psychoanalytic psychotherapy may not be recommended. At other times there will be an agreement to undertake further treatment at the Department. Recommendations from the psychotherapist will always include a consideration of the likely impact of intensive psychotherapy on your overall emotional stability, the question of whether this approach is likely to be effective with your particular problems, and whether a different approach may be more likely to be effective. Another consideration will be your current life situation and the level of support you have to help you sustain a treatment that can stimulate very powerful emotions and reactions. Sometimes this is a matter of timing.
- These issues will be discussed with you. This is not a decision purely for the psychotherapist however; one of the aims of the assessment is to give you an experience of what this kind of psychotherapy is like, and to help you reach an informed decision about what you would like to do.
- If you do undertake **brief or longer term individual psychotherapy** this may well be with the psychotherapist you have seen for the assessment. However there are also clinicians on placement and in training at the department, under supervision by senior psychotherapists here, and it is possible that you will be offered a vacancy with one of these clinicians.
- There are also different types of **group psychotherapy** offered at the department, and this may be the recommended treatment. This includes the **borderline reflective group** which is a form of treatment specifically aimed at helping people with borderline personality disorder or traits.
- We have more detailed written information available on all of these options. You can also talk through and agree with the therapist what will be the aim of a further treatment and what it will involve, its frequency etc.

We hope you have found this information useful and encourage you to discuss anything that is written here in your assessment meetings.

## Our contact details are:

Regional Department of Psychotherapy  
Benfield House  
Walkergate Park  
Benfield Road  
Newcastle upon Tyne  
NE6 4PF  
Tel: 0191 287 6100  
Fax: 0191 287 6101  
Email: cspt@ntw.nhs.uk

Please note that information sent to the Trust via email is sent at your own risk.

## Useful contacts

- **United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy UKCP**  
Website: [www.psychotherapy.org.uk](http://www.psychotherapy.org.uk)
- **British Psychoanalytic Council** - Information, news and debate about psychoanalytic and psychodynamic psychotherapies  
Website: [www.pschoanalytic-council.org](http://www.pschoanalytic-council.org)
- **Royal College of Psychiatrists**  
Website: [www.rcpsych.ac.uk](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk)
- **PALS**  
The Patient Advice and Liaison Service can be contacted on free phone 0800 032 02 02, or email [northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk](mailto:northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk), for advice and support.

## References

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## What if I have a comment, suggestion, compliment or complaint about the service?

If you want to make a comment, suggestion, compliment or complaint you can:

- talk to the people directly involved in your care or the Team Manager at the Centre for Specialist Psychological Therapies: Telephone 0191 287 6100
- ask a member of staff for a feedback form, or complete a form on the Trust website [www.ntw.nhs.uk](http://www.ntw.nhs.uk) (click on the 'Contact Us' tab)
- telephone the Complaints Department Tel: 0191 245 6672
- We are always looking at ways to improve services. Your feedback allows us to monitor the quality of our services and act upon issues that you bring to our attention.
  - **Points of You** - available on wards or from staff. Some areas of the Trust have electronic feedback touch screens, staff can help you to use these.
  - **Friends and Family Test** - available from staff or online at [www.ntw.nhs.uk/fft](http://www.ntw.nhs.uk/fft)



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