

# Clinical health psychology in the management of CFS/ME

Cornwall and Isles of Scilly  
Chronic Fatigue Syndrome/ME Service



**One + all | we care**

## **Who is this leaflet for?**

This leaflet is for people with CFS/ME. It aims to address some of the questions or concerns that you may have about seeing a Clinical Health Psychologist for CFS/ME.

## **What is the Cornwall CFS/ME Service?**

It is a countywide service providing: diagnosis, assessment, treatment, review, information and advice. Consultations are offered face-to-face in clinic or in your home, and/or on the telephone and/or via video if you are unable to visit a clinic. Face-to-face medical and clinical specialist consultations are offered in clinic at Truro, psychology consultations in clinic at Truro, Hayle (St Michael's) and Bodmin, and specialist occupational therapy in your home. Interventions are delivered on a one-to-one basis, as a couple, family or in group work, as clinically appropriate.

The service aims to help people with CFS/ME to:

- learn new skills
- choose to do things differently
- better manage your condition
- improve your symptoms
- increase your well-being.

This service is provided by a multi-disciplinary team (more than one professional): a Medical Consultant, a Clinical Specialist Therapist, Specialist Occupational Therapists (OTs), a Consultant Clinical Health Psychologist, a Clinical Secretary/Administrator and a supporting admin team. Referrals onto other health professionals (Physiotherapists, Dieticians, etc) for specialist advice can be arranged if appropriate.

## **What is a Clinical Health Psychologist?**

Clinical Health Psychologists aim to enable people to resolve or cope more effectively with difficulties they are experiencing. These difficulties may be emotional, physical or associated with certain situations or relationships.

People sometimes confuse Clinical Health Psychologists with other professions whose roles can be similar, such as Psychotherapists or Counsellors,

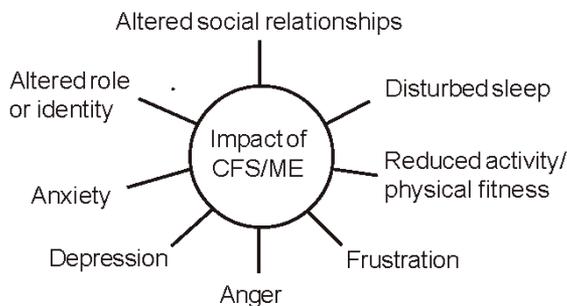
and most particularly Psychiatrists (medical doctors who specialise in mental health issues). One of the main differences between Psychiatrists and Clinical Health Psychologists is that Psychiatrists may prescribe medication whereas Clinical Health Psychologists do not.

At the Cornwall CFS/ME Service, the Clinical Health Psychologist works alongside Medical Doctors and Specialist Occupational Therapists. In this setting, the Clinical Health Psychologist's main focus is on helping you understand, adjust and cope more effectively with CFS/ME and is there to help and encourage you along the way.

### **What does Clinical Health Psychology have to do with CFS/ME?**

If you ask a group of people who experience CFS/ME to describe the effect that CFS/ME has had on their lives, they may mention: changes in their work, daily activities, energy levels, family and social relationships, perhaps being more irritable, demoralised, anxious or depressed, or having problems with their sleep and diet etc.

Though each person will have had a unique experience, most will say that CFS/ME has had a big effect on their lives.



This impact on daily life is a two-way process. Not only does CFS/ME affect the way we think about situations, how we feel and behave, but how we understand CFS/ME is also affected by our mood, our thoughts and the things we do. In other words, our experience of CFS/ME is a complex interaction between mind and body.

## **How may seeing a Clinical Health Psychologist help?**

Clinical Health Psychologists are trained to facilitate your understanding of what may make CFS/ME more difficult to manage. With more understanding, you can:

- become better able to cope with CFS/ME
- adapt to or overcome certain difficulties associated with your situation
- improve your quality of life and relationships despite having to live with CFS/ME.

As CFS/ME involves a range of factors (physical, social, psychological and occupational), CFS/ME is often referred to as multi-dimensional, which is why most specialist services nowadays employ a wide range of professionals working together as a team.

At Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS Trust, we aim to offer you a comprehensive assessment of your needs and/or situation, taking into account the wide-ranging factors contributing to your CFS/ME. Offering a multi-disciplinary team approach is more likely to result in effective treatments supported by current research. However, this does not mean that you will need to see each and every member of the team.

## **What will happen during my appointment?**

A meeting with the Clinical Health Psychologist from the team usually lasts about one and a half to two hours for an initial consultation. This allows time for you to talk about how your CFS/ME affects your day-to-day life. To build up as full a picture as possible, the Clinical Health Psychologist will ask you some general questions about yourself, your background and your family as well as some specific questions relating to your experience of CFS/ME.

There will be opportunity during the meeting to discuss why this information is relevant when deciding what treatment or intervention to recommend. Occasionally, it may be useful to meet more than once. You are welcome to invite to the consultation someone who is important in helping you manage CFS/ME.

### **What will not happen during my appointment?**

- Clinical Health Psychologists do not mind read! You choose what you want to tell the Clinical Health Psychologist. However, she or he will help you, if you wish to discuss anything you may find confusing or difficult.
- Clinical Health Psychologists do not prescribe medication; your General Practitioner (GP) or Medical Consultant will do this, if necessary.
- The Clinical Health Psychologist will not diagnose or give you a definite explanation regarding the cause of CFS/ME.
- The Clinical Health Psychologist will not view your experience of CFS/ME as 'all in the mind'. We will accept your experience as real and genuine.

### **What happens next?**

You have received this leaflet because your Medical Professional or Clinical Specialist Therapist or Specialist Occupational Therapist at the CFS/ME Service thought that you may benefit from a consultation with a Clinical Health Psychologist. **(If you would like an appointment, please fill in the attached form and return it to the address indicated.)**

If after reading this leaflet, you are still undecided about making an appointment, or have any queries, you may contact:

Dr Cristina López-Chertudi - Consultant Lead Clinical Health Psychologist,  
Systemic and Family Psychotherapist  
Tel 01872 252935

### **How do I provide feedback about the service?**

If you have any complaint, comment, or compliment to make about the treatment you have received or any other aspect of your care, we would be grateful if you would bring them to our attention. If you have a complaint please let us know as soon as possible so that we can try to put things right.

You can make a complaint about the service by contacting either the Patient and Family Experience Team on 01872 252793, or the Specialty Lead and Service Manager on 01872 252935 or write to her:

Carol Wilson, Specialty Lead, Cornwall & IoS CFS/ME Service, The Lighthouse, Royal Cornwall Hospital, Truro, TR1 3LJ.

Written by Dr J. Ackland, Dr L. Green & Dr C. López-Chertudi, Chartered Clinical Psychologists, and thanks to Prof A. Pinching, Retired Professor in Clinical Immunology and C. Wilson, Speciality Lead, for their comments.

If you would like this leaflet in large print, braille, audio version or in another language, please contact the General Office on 01872 252690

