



The British  
Psychological Society



Division of  
Clinical Psychology

# National Mental Health, Well-being and Psychological Therapies – the role of Clinical Psychology

*A briefing paper for NHS Commissioners*

## **A briefing paper for NHS Commissioners**

This paper has been prepared to assist Commissioners in understanding how Clinical Psychologists can contribute to the implementation of the Mental Health Strategy. Brief examples are included to demonstrate effective interventions that reduce costs.

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## Introduction and Background

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Mental health, well-being and talking therapies have become strategic priorities for the NHS. Effective psychological interventions and therapies can contribute not only by improving the health and well-being of individuals but also the health of the nation through employability, productivity and social inclusion.

The 2011 Mental Health Strategy for England – ‘No health without mental health: A cross-government mental health outcomes strategy for people of all ages’ – identifies key strategic directions for mental health. These include a commitment:

- to improve mental health services, providing cost-effective evidence-based treatments;
- to ensure early and accurate identification of health needs;
- to tackle the underlying cause of mental ill health and to reduce social inequality;
- to invest in prevention and recovery services across the lifespan (and across physical-mental health boundaries);
- to improve patient experience, safeguard patient safety, measure outcomes, provide strong clinical leadership and clinical governance, whilst also providing value for money.

The Mental Health Strategy takes an unashamedly ‘well-being’ stance, recognising that early interventions can help reduce the estimated £105 billion annual costs to the economy of mental ill health. Early interventions that lead to good outcomes will be required for successful delivery of the 2011 Mental Health Strategy. The Mental Health Strategy also prioritises psychosocial interventions and includes a commitment to further increase investment in evidence-based psychological therapies.

## What do Clinical Psychologists do?

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Clinical Psychologists provide face-to-face therapy for individuals, families and groups. They also supervise and teach other professions to provide psychological treatments. Clinical Psychologists apply the science of Psychology to a range of clinical health care services. Clinical Psychologists use this knowledge to design, implement and evaluate health care services that enhance well-being and minimises ill health and impairment. They are trained to apply their knowledge in systematic methods and practice which are scientifically evaluated and to test clinical practice for its effectiveness. Clinical Psychologists offer leadership in organisational development, audit, service redesign and development.

**Example of Good Practice:** A Clinical Psychologist in Hackney worked with a local GP to provide a service for frequently attending patients. Many of these patients present with medically unexplained symptoms. The new service aimed to reduce the economic and emotional costs associated with this complex patient group by providing psychological therapy for the patients, support to GP practices in managing complex cases, and training to GP practice staff. Evaluation data demonstrates that GPs are better able to manage this patient group and that the emotional burden is reduced. Patient improvement (77 to 82 per cent) and recovery (52 to 55 per cent) rates are good. This innovative service is now linked to 90 per cent of GP surgeries in City & Hackney PCT.

## What makes Clinical Psychology distinct?

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Clinical Psychologists can apply a range of evidence-based treatments. Research expertise delivered into services creates a unique science-based clinical profile, bringing clinical expertise in psychological approaches to health, well-being and performance, utilising both direct and indirect applications.

Clinical approaches which have become part of the 'accepted norm' and are shown to be ineffective can be robustly challenged, discarded or altered. This reduces excess waste and costs of maintaining the status quo for its own sake (thereby highlighting key value of Clinical Psychology in supporting quality, cost-effective health care, and conducting contract challenge processes in commissioning organisations).

**Example of Good Practice:** Clinical Psychologists in Humber Mental Health Foundation Trust worked closely with operational managers and commissioners to redesign the way psychology was delivered in IAPT services in the East Riding to reduce waiting times and help to ensure that service users see the professional with the right skills at the right time. Working collaboratively with secondary care services they were able to create a smoother pathway and draw from a range of levels of skill and experience in the total psychology provision. In-house training was also provided to IAPT workers. Services were reviewed to become needs led in regard to different client groups, for example, reflecting co-morbidities with regard to ageing. Waiting time and the number of patients waiting for treatment have been reduced by approximately 80 per cent.

### Assessment

High quality assessment helps to ensure that the needs of each individual patient are clearly understood and directs patients to the right treatment pathways. That is good for patients, avoids waste of resources, and supports cost effective provision. Comprehensive psychological assessments enable Clinical Psychologists to produce formulations that inform appropriate treatment. Early and reliable recognition of signs of mental distress, illness and disability leads to the earliest and most effective interventions and treatments.

**Example of Good Practice:** In Central Suffolk the Learning Disability Psychology Service set up a flexible access arrangement allowing community learning disability nursing teams to access psychological supervision and consultancy support, as well as direct psychological assessment and intervention for more complex cases with minimal delays. Compared to working from what previously was a problematic waiting list, this arrangement led to a more efficient service with improved team working, while at the same time benefiting service users and increasing the satisfaction of staff teams with the psychology input to their service users.

## Formulation and Intervention

The Mental Health Strategy recognises that there is often no single or clear diagnosis for many mental health problems. Under these circumstances a psychological assessment and formulation is invaluable. Formulation is a core skill for all Clinical Psychologists. It can be described as a summary of an individual's difficulties, grounded in psychological theory, and indicating the most appropriate intervention.

Research has shown that formulation can serve a range of purposes for teams, including generating new ways of thinking, achieving a consistent approach to intervention, helping to manage risk, and raising staff morale<sup>1,2</sup>. Formulation underpins differential assessment which can accurately identify and distinguish between the contribution of neurological or developmental impairment, psychological functioning and environmental or social contributions.

For populations with more complex problems and medically unexplained symptoms, psychological formulation and intervention can reduce unhelpful and costly inpatient admissions. It will often be appropriate for psychological and psychiatric assessments to be carried out to provide forward thinking and integrated care. This is also seen in the joint working of Psychologists and Medical Consultants, for example, working with Paediatricians to differentiate neurodevelopmental and mental health formulations.

**Example of Good Practice:** Clinical Psychologists on the Isle of Wight developed a new psychological therapy service (Dialectical Behaviour Therapy) to treat Borderline Personality Disorder patients. They provided training for other professions and led the implementation of the new treatment approach. Outcome measures showed that inpatient bed use for these clients fell by more than half, A and E attendance fell by more than a quarter, and the use of Medical Assessment beds fell by 94 per cent. Clients found the service useful and reported a reduction in symptoms. These benefits combined to produce an overall saving of 58 per cent (£167,468 over a 12-month period).<sup>3,4</sup>

# Clinical Psychology's contribution to the Mental Health strategy

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## **Early identification and intervention to tackle the social determinants of mental ill health**

Psychological research has made a significant contribution to our understanding of the causes and effective treatments for a range of mental health problems. Specialised and unique knowledge and skills enable understanding of the social and personal context for experiences of ill health. Early intervention utilising psychological treatment approaches is good for patients and is cost-effective.

**Example of Good Practice:** Clinical Psychologists in the Northumberland Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust have calculated that early intervention in psychosis can save almost half a million pounds in a year and recommend the extension of early intervention for a range of other mental health problems to create additional savings.<sup>5</sup>

## **Improving the quality of current mental and physical health services**

Guided by the Leadership Development Framework, Clinical Psychologists offer expertise and leadership in organisational development, audit, service redesign, and policy development. Clinical Psychologists deliver innovative service development and re-design in mental health services.

**Example of Good Practice:** Clinical Psychologists at Great Ormond Street Hospital NHS Trust have developed and validated the first parent-related outcome measure of parental understanding of child neurodisability.<sup>6</sup> They showed that greater parental understanding is related to lower parenting stress and higher parenting competence, providing a new psychological and mental health benchmark. The measure is now being used to evaluate and compare paediatric neurodisability services to identify the most effective, and, therefore, cost-effective clinical strategies in this area.



## Effective investment in the promotion of positive mental health and prevention and recovery services across the lifespan (and across physical-mental health boundaries)

A framework for Clinical Psychology is based around five strategic purposes: to prevent mental and physical ill health from occurring in the first place; to prevent anyone with mental ill health from deteriorating; to restore anyone with mental ill health back to their normal level of independent life and beyond; to support and raise the standard of independent life amongst those with chronic mental ill health; and finally, to facilitate a sustained approach to prevention.

**Example of Good Practice:** In Milton Keynes a new team aims to meet the Commissioners' reduction in readmission target for those patients who have long-term conditions. A psychological approach is being used to support the Hospital to Home to Stay service, working with the nursing staff who look after patients who are discharged from the wards, who also have unmet mental health needs and who do not meet the criteria for entry into secondary mental health services, for example, patients who misuse alcohol and who have difficult anxiety and personality presentations. Training and case consultation is provided and a new care pathway is being developed.

## Ensuring cost-effective evidence-based treatments and treatment pathways that minimise waste

Clinical Psychologists carry out and apply research, ensuring a continually developing evidence base so that current services can be improved and supporting timely and cost-effective application in a range of services across the lifespan, including:

- problem solving approaches to address the psychosocial determinants of ill health;
- innovative service development in acute services;
- co-ordinated intervention for co-morbid physical and mental health problems;
- assessment and formulation to address medically unexplained symptoms;
- interventions that promote resilience and coping, enabling employment;
- comprehensive science-based assessment to identify effective strategies and minimise waste.

**Example of Good Practice:** A Clinical Psychologist in the Cheshire and Wirral NHS Foundation Trust provided psychological treatment for a patient with a dissociative identity disorder who had a long history of psychiatric treatment including inpatient treatments. Psychological treatment produced a saving of more than £20,000 per year for this patient's care. <sup>7</sup>

## **Collaborative working**

The needs of populations across the lifespan are creating demands that requires many health care professionals to develop skills in the delivery of cost-effective evidence-based psychological treatments. The combination of indirect application skills (e.g. expert supervision, consultancy and problem solving skills, teaching and training, service development) means that Clinical Psychologists are equipped to lead and support teams of clinical workers in providing psychologically informed assessment and treatment. This can help provider and commissioning organisations ensure that clinical governance standards are maintained. The Leadership Development Framework<sup>8</sup> shows how Clinical Psychologists are expected to work together with service directors and managers, providing leadership in service development and design, informed by the science knowledge base. Good leadership for collaborative working will improve patient experience, protect patient safety, and assist the implementation of the 2011 Mental Health Strategy.

## **Conclusion**

Clinical Psychologists provide unique and valuable contributions in a range of health care settings. Psychological assessment directs patients to the appropriate treatment pathways. Evidence-based psychological treatments are provided through direct clinical work and by supporting other health professionals through training, supervision and service development. These contributions will support the implementation of the Mental Health Strategy, providing great value for money to commissioners and patients.

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