

Health psychology in applied settings

A guide for employers



- What is a health psychologist and where do they work?
 - Meeting targets and policy initiatives
- The essential qualifications



The role

What is a health psychologist?

Health psychologists are experts in applying psychological knowledge, research and interventions to promote and improve health and the health care system and to inform health policy. They work with patients, carers/family, healthy community members and health care professionals, in groups, with individuals and with organisations.

What areas within applied settings do they work?

Public Health Services

Health psychologists are working to:

- improve adherence to public health screening programmes and targets;
- increase outcomes on smoking cessation, drug and alcohol rehabilitation and weight loss programmes;
- train primary care staff to facilitate healthy patient self-management;
- reduce GP attendance by increasing public awareness of risks to health and improving self-management of illness; and
- implement strategic planning and service development to advance health check programmes, improve quality of life outcomes and reduce health risks.

Medical/Illness Services

Health psychologists support hospital and community services through:

- direct psychological work with patients, families and carers (for example helping them to adjust to illness and treatment);
- pacing and goal setting for rehabilitation programmes;
- psychological preparation for surgery and confidence building within rehabilitation (this can reduce bed days);
- support for allied health professions to improve psychological and communication skills.

Position/Band	Role
Consultant Health Psychologist 8c/8d	<p>Provides a lead role across their NHS organisation for health psychology services and implementing national policy and standards of practice. Have at least five years' post-qualification experience and advanced competences in the application of evidence-based clinical skills, research and interventions. They will manage and supervise psychologists and other allied health professionals to deliver psychological interventions and care (e.g. managing tobacco control and smoking cessation services). They provide overall line-management of their staff services and are responsible for service developments, commissioning of services and the development and evaluation of service strategy and direction. Consultants are responsible for developing and initiating Trust policy and psychological practice and advising on the impact of non-psychology policies on clinical care and Trust objectives.</p>
Principal Health Psychologist 8b	<p>Provides specialist health psychology services within their area of expertise (e.g. heart and lung transplant; weight loss surgery). Have at least three years' post-qualification experience and hold positions that require them to provide supervision, support and consultation to the wider multi-disciplinary team. They have clinical leadership and management skills to work with junior members of the team. They will design, develop and implement publishable research and initiate the implementation of policy and standards of practice within their service.</p>
Health Psychologist 7/8a/8b	<p>Provides a health psychology service to medical directorates (e.g. weight or pain management programmes). Have at least one year's post-qualification experience and will work independently but require supervision to consolidate their training and practice. Competences include applying knowledge and skills in helping patients adapt to lifestyle changes, risk factor reduction, goal setting for rehabilitation and improving quality of life outcomes.</p>
Health Psychologist in Training/ Assistant Health Psychologist 6	<p>Works under supervision from a qualified health psychologist. Competent to provide a focused service such as the assessment of patients and the delivery of brief focused psychological interventions to promote adjustment to long-term physical health conditions and change behaviours relevant to health. Trainees have research competences in systematic reviews of literature, data analysis and audit. Health psychologists in training need regular supervision and study time to work on their training portfolio.</p>

What employers need to know

Other roles for health psychologists within applied settings

Health psychologists may also be employed within applied settings under other job titles (such as stop smoking specialist). However, not using the title 'health psychologist' may cause recruitment and management difficulties for these posts and it may be unclear to service users and commissioners alike about the skills required for the post. It is, therefore, advisable to use the title 'health psychologist' where appropriate.

Meeting targets and policy initiatives: Where can health psychologists help?

Health psychologists can play an important role in helping to meet targets and policy initiatives such as National Service Frameworks (including those for chronic heart disease, and cancer and services for older people and children), White Papers (including 'Liberating the NHS' and 'Healthy Lives, Healthy People') and the implementation of NICE guidelines (such as those on behaviour change, health promotion, disease prevention and palliative care).

The essential qualifications of a health psychologist

Health psychologists are registered by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) and are eligible for full membership of the Division of Health Psychology within the British Psychological Society (BPS), the professional body. All qualified health psychologists must engage in and record their continuing professional development (CPD) for psychology each year. Health psychologists in training must be registered with the BPS Stage 2 training route or with a BPS-accredited university doctoral health psychology programme. Registered Health Psychologists who are Chartered with the BPS have undertaken a minimum of six years of training and specialised in health psychology for a minimum of three years.

Find out more at:

www.bps.org.uk/dhp



The British
Psychological Society
Division of Health Psychology