

a patient's guide



East and North Hertfordshire
NHS Trust

Counselling

Patient Information Series PI 46

A patient's guide to counselling at Mount Vernon Cancer Centre

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Introduction

This leaflet explains how patients may be helped by counselling. Many people who have had cancer say that they have a wide range of emotions and thoughts both expected and unexpected. Everyone is different and you will deal with things in your own way.

Many patients find it to be a stressful, anxious and confusing time. Some find it harder to make decisions or to face up to things, feeling overwhelmed and less able to focus on positive aspects within their lives. Many patients also find cancer can have an impact on their close relationships.

Counselling is a process which may help you to manage your concerns and worries more effectively and feel better able to cope. It provides a safe place to explore issues in confidence.

Often it is easier to talk to a professional person than to your family or friends. You may be frightened of upsetting people who are close to you or, equally, your family may be worried about upsetting you. You will see the same counsellor/psychologist for all your appointments.

Counselling aims to provide individuals and families the space and time they need to understand their experiences in a way that can help them feel they can cope.

How can counselling help?

The emotional impact of a cancer diagnosis can present serious challenges for patients and people close to them.

It can result in high levels of worry, anxiety, depression, a lack of confidence or self-esteem and an inability to concentrate, as well as triggering anxiety and problems from the past.

Counselling can help people deal more effectively with issues such as:

- dealing with uncertainty
- worries about the future
- body image concerns
- sexual problems
- fear of treatment (eg, needle phobia)
- stress
- anger
- relationship difficulties
- sleep disturbance
- panic attacks
- anticipatory nausea and vomiting

If you have difficulty making sense of your feelings or can relate to any of the above or other such experiences, you may find it helpful talking it through with a trained counsellor/psychologist. If you are finding it difficult to talk, our art psychotherapist may be able to help you by using more visual methods.

What is art psychotherapy?

In art psychotherapy, art materials are used as a way to express thoughts and feelings which may be difficult to put into words.

During the session, the art psychotherapist's role is to provide a caring and safe environment so you feel comfortable to express yourself both verbally and creatively.

It will be up to you to decide how much you wish to reflect and talk about the artwork.

Do I need to be good at art?

No. Being good at art is not required to be able to benefit from art psychotherapy.

The art psychotherapist will support you in the use of different art materials. However, it is not an art lesson—your artwork will not be judged in any way.

As well as giving psychological support, art psychotherapy can provide a creative experience which can enhance your quality of life and general well-being.

Suitability for counselling?

If you or your family feel counselling might be helpful, drop into the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre (LJMC). You can refer yourself or speak to your doctor, oncologist (cancer specialist), nurse, radiographer or any member of your health care team.

The psychological therapists working in the LJMC are experienced in working with people with cancer.

When referred for counselling, you will be invited for an assessment session. During this session the counsellor/psychologist will talk with you about how counselling may help. We offer a range of counselling approaches, including art psychotherapy.

If counselling is suitable, you will be offered up to six more appointments. This means a time commitment which you need to consider before you go ahead with counselling.

You will be placed on the waiting list and contacted as soon as an appointment is available.

Who is eligible to use the service?

All LJMC services are offered free of charge to NHS patients (and their carers) under the care of an oncologist based at Mount Vernon Cancer Centre.

Private patients having treatment at Mount Vernon may also be eligible to use our services. Please call the Helpline for details on 020 3826 2555.

How do I book for counselling sessions?

You can access the counselling service by:

- referring yourself by dropping in to the LJMC or by calling the LJMC Helpline on 020 3826 2555.
- someone in your health care team may refer you with your consent

How does the session take place?

We now offer sessions in person at the LJMC, as well as online and by telephone. We will discuss this with you when we contact you to make your first appointment.

If you are offered a remote appointment (ie, via phone/video) it is essential that you find a private space where you can talk in confidence for the whole of the appointment.

What if I can't attend a session?

If you have an appointment and you are unable to keep it, please let us know at least 24 hours in advance by calling the above helpline. This will enable us to offer the appointment slot to someone else.

What does the counselling session cost?

There is no charge for these sessions. However, any donations towards our costs are always gratefully received, as many of the services at the LJMC are funded by charitable donations.

How long will the counselling session last?

Each session will last fifty minutes to an hour so please try to arrive on time as your session is reduced if you are late. Please allow plenty of time for parking.

There is a charge for parking at the hospital with a reduced parking rate for patients attending the Cancer Centre. Please ask for details when booking an appointment.

Can I get counselling outside the hospital?

You may be able to access your Primary Care Counselling Service or other local services via a referral from your family doctor (GP). You will need to discuss this with your GP.

There is also a national self referral service 'Improving Access to Psychological Therapy' (IAPT) available; please see the Choices website for further details.

Your counsellor/psychologist may also be able to give you details of other services near to you. Please ask in the LJMC for our list of independent therapists.

Research and evaluation of counselling service

Everyone who attends a session is asked to complete a questionnaire. This assesses progress by asking patients how they are feeling at the start of counselling and again at the end.

This information, together with details such as age, gender, type of cancer and waiting times etc, is used for the evaluation of the counselling service.

Please note that all information collected for evaluation is coded and completely anonymous, ie, you will not be identified by name. You can choose not to complete these questionnaires and this will not affect your therapy in any way.

Frequently asked questions

What is the purpose of the assessment session?

The initial session takes the form of a discussion to understand your situation. Specific issues, coping techniques and sources of support will be discussed. You and the counsellor/psychologist will then decide whether counselling is the right choice for you at this stage.

What happens after the assessment?

You will either be given an appointment for your first counselling session or you will be put on a waiting list and contacted when an appointment is available.

How many sessions will I have?

You may have up to six sessions, and this will be decided between you and the counsellor/psychologist depending on your needs.

Are the sessions confidential?

Yes, these sessions are confidential but a brief letter is sent to your oncologist, GP and/or referrer with your consent. This is to inform your health care team that you are accessing supportive sessions. If you would like a copy of this letter please ask.

If the counsellor/psychologist feels that there is a serious risk of harm to yourself or to others, he/she will contact your GP or other clinician. This would usually be discussed with you first.

What if I don't want to continue with my sessions?

You can decide to stop your counselling sessions at any time. All you need to do is inform your counsellor/psychologist or call the LJMC Helpline to cancel the sessions. You can still access other services at LJMC such as the drop in centre, relaxation classes, etc.

Who can I contact for more information?

If you would like more information about the counselling service, please drop in to the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre or phone their Helpline on 020 3826 2555.

Other information that may be helpful

We have produced a series of factsheets, available from the LJMC, which you may find helpful:

- Coping with anxiety (HHC213)
- Living with tiredness (fatigue) (HHC229)
- Moving on to supportive and palliative care (HHC238)
- Getting help when an adult is bereaved (HHC256)
- Getting help when a child or young person is bereaved (HHC220)

Macmillan Cancer Support has produced a range of leaflets about the emotional effects of cancer. Please ask your therapist or the staff in the LJMC for more information.

This publication has been produced by the Information team at Mount Vernon Cancer Centre. Contributors include health professionals, patients and carers who have expertise and experience in the topics covered by this publication. All our publications are reviewed and updated regularly. If you would like any details of the references used to write this information please contact the Information team on 020 3826 2555.

Other help and support

People who have cancer often say that, during their illness, they experience a range of emotions. Many find it to be a stressful, anxious and confusing time.

If you have any questions or concerns about cancer and your treatment, are struggling to cope or need some support, please visit the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre (LJMC). Please feel free to drop in before, during or after any of your visits to the Cancer Centre.

The team at the LJMC works as part of the overall team caring for you to provide help, support and information in a relaxed setting to help you better cope with cancer and its treatment. Your family and friends are also welcome to visit the centre or call the Helpline.

A range of support services are available at the centre. These include complementary therapy, relaxation sessions, counselling and financial advice. Please ask for more details.

You do not need an appointment to visit the LJMC which is located next to the Chemotherapy Suite by Gate 3. If you are unable to get to the LJMC, you can call the Helpline on 020 3826 2555.

Please see the back page of this leaflet for more information.

Mount Vernon Cancer Centre is committed to ensuring that patients receive the best quality of care regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation.

Questions or concerns about cancer and treatment? Struggling to cope? Need some support? Need to talk?

Drop in to the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre
or call the support & information helpline

We will listen to your concerns, answer your questions
and guide you to further information
and services to help you

cancer treatment	practical support
side effects of treatment	headwear workshops
day-to-day living with cancer	exercise
benefits advice	diet and nutrition
counselling	health and wellbeing
someone to talk to	talking to family and friends
emotional support	Look Good Feel Better
complementary therapy	self-help courses
relaxation services	life after cancer

The Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre is situated between the
Cancer Centre and Gate 3 (White Hill)

Opening hours: Monday–Friday 9.30am–4.30pm

020 3826 2555

www.ljmc.org

Supporting people affected by cancer
from diagnosis, through treatment and beyond