

## Psychosexual Information and Services

### What is psychosexual therapy?

Psychology is the science of the human mind and behaviour, thus, psychosexual therapy is the application of psychology to the realm of human sexuality, using a bio-psycho-social approach. Psychosexual therapy begins with an initial conversation with an individual or couple about their sexuality related difficulty, which may be regarding sexual or gender identity, sexual orientation, sexual functioning (difficulties with desire, arousal, ejaculation/ orgasm, pain or satisfaction), disability or illness. The therapist will develop with the client(s) a shared understanding of what factors have contributed to the development and maintenance of the sexual difficulties, and this will highlight areas to focus on in on-going therapy as well as exercises for the person(s) to do at home.

### The need for cancer psychosexual services

People with poor physical health (once age and relationship status are controlled for) are less likely than people with good physical health to report recent sex or satisfaction with their sex lives<sup>1</sup>.

Surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy and hormone therapy specifically impact on the physiological systems involved in sexual functioning, that is, anatomy, neuro-vascular systems and hormones. Further, a cancer diagnosis and treatment can indirectly impact on physiological systems via changes in thinking, emotion and behaviour.

One survey found that one-fifth of respondents said that they had had sexual concerns during their recently finished treatment for cancer<sup>2</sup>. Another survey estimated that of those people diagnosed with cancer in the previous five years, almost one in five had sexual difficulties<sup>3</sup>. This proportion increased for certain cancer groups, for example, they found that over two-thirds of prostate cancer patients reported no erection or difficulties achieving and maintaining an erection.

### Guidelines advocating the delivery of cancer psychosexual services

The NICE Improving Supportive and Palliative Care for Adults with Cancer guidelines require psychological support services to provide assessment and treatment for “psychosexual difficulties (such as erectile dysfunction and loss of libido)” (pp. 75) and that staff members can include “psychosexual counsellors” (pp. 134)<sup>4</sup>. Level 4 interventions include the provision of “specialist

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<sup>1</sup> Field, J., Mercer, C.H., Sonnenberg, P., Tanton, C., Clifton, S., Mitchell, K.R., ... Johnson, A.M. (2013). Associations between health and sexual lifestyles in Britain: findings from the third National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (Natsal-3). *The Lancet*, 382, 1830-1844.

<sup>2</sup> Brennan, J., Gingell, P., Brant, H., & Hollingworth, W. (2012). Refinement of the distress management problem list as the basis for a holistic therapeutic conversation among UK patients with cancer. *Psycho-Oncology*, 21(12), 1346-56. 10.1002/pon.2045

<sup>3</sup> Macmillan. (2013). Cured – but at what cost? Long term consequences of cancer and its treatment. Retrieved from [http://www.macmillan.org.uk/Documents/AboutUs/Newsroom/Consequences\\_of\\_Treatment\\_June2013.pdf](http://www.macmillan.org.uk/Documents/AboutUs/Newsroom/Consequences_of_Treatment_June2013.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> National Institute for Clinical Excellence. (2004). Guidance on improving support and palliative care for adults with cancer. London, UK: NICE.

psychological and psychiatric interventions for ... severe inter-personal difficulties (including severe psychosexual problems)” (pp. 80).

### Existing psychosexual services

There is a limited number of Level 3 and 4 psychological practitioners providing psychosexual services in the *London Cancer* region - please contact your local cancer psychological service to identify if psychosexual services are provided.

London sexual health services have an open access policy regardless of where a person lives – some services specifically provide psychosexual services and so cancer patients may be able to access these services.

Service providers	Contact details
Anthony Wisdom Centre for Sexual Health	Orsett Hospital, Rowley Road, Orsett, Grays, Essex, RM16 3EU. Tel: 01268 592214
Barts Health Sexual Health	<a href="http://www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/our-services/services-a-z/s/sexual-health/">http://www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/our-services/services-a-z/s/sexual-health/</a>
Barking Hospital	Upney lane Essex IG11 9LX. Tel. 020 3644 2301
Camden Sexual Problems Assessment and Treatment Service 56 Dean Street	44 Wicklow Street, London, WC1X 9HL. Tel. 020 3317 5122. <a href="mailto:psychosexualteamadmin@nhs.net">psychosexualteamadmin@nhs.net</a> Psychosexual Clinic, 56 Dean Street, Soho, W1D 6AQ. <a href="http://www.chelwest.nhs.uk/services/hiv-sexual-health/clinics/56-dean-street/psychosexual-therapy">http://www.chelwest.nhs.uk/services/hiv-sexual-health/clinics/56-dean-street/psychosexual-therapy</a>
North Middlesex Hospital	Psychosexual Clinic, North Middlesex Hospital, Sterling Way, Edmonton, London, N18 1QX
Sydenham Centre - Sexual Health for North East London	Barking Hospital, Upney lane, Barking, London, IG11 9LX. Tel: 01708 503 838. <a href="http://www.sho-me.nhs.uk/local-services/sexual-health-services/sydenham-centre.aspx">http://www.sho-me.nhs.uk/local-services/sexual-health-services/sydenham-centre.aspx</a>
Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships	<a href="http://www.tccr.org.uk/index.php/relationship-counselling-service/help-with-sexual-problems">http://www.tccr.org.uk/index.php/relationship-counselling-service/help-with-sexual-problems</a>

**Sources of psychosexual information**

Useful websites	Link
Breast Cancer Care	<a href="https://www.breastcancercare.org.uk/information-support/facing-breast-cancer/living-beyond-breast-cancer/your-body/sex-intimacy">https://www.breastcancercare.org.uk/information-support/facing-breast-cancer/living-beyond-breast-cancer/your-body/sex-intimacy</a>
Cancer Research UK	<a href="http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/coping-with-cancer/coping-physically/sex-sexuality-and-cancer/">http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/coping-with-cancer/coping-physically/sex-sexuality-and-cancer/</a>
COSRT (College of Sexual and Relationship Therapists)	<a href="http://www.cosrt.org.uk/information-for-members-of-the-public/sex-and-cancer/">http://www.cosrt.org.uk/information-for-members-of-the-public/sex-and-cancer/</a> . Has a directory of therapists working with people with sexual and relationship problems
International Society for Sex and Cancer	<a href="http://www.isc.nu/">http://www.isc.nu/</a>
Macmillan	<a href="http://www.macmillan.org.uk/GetInvolved/Campaigns/Successstories/SexualRelationships/SexAndCancer.aspx">http://www.macmillan.org.uk/GetInvolved/Campaigns/Successstories/SexualRelationships/SexAndCancer.aspx</a>
Men 4 Men. Sexual health outreach project	<a href="http://www.gay-bedfordshire.co.uk/what-is-the-specialist-psychosexual-therapy-service.htm">http://www.gay-bedfordshire.co.uk/what-is-the-specialist-psychosexual-therapy-service.htm</a>
Prostate Cancer UK	<a href="http://prostatecanceruk.org/prostate-information/living-with-prostate-cancer/sex-and-relationships">http://prostatecanceruk.org/prostate-information/living-with-prostate-cancer/sex-and-relationships</a>
Scientific Network on Female Sexual Health and Cancer	<a href="http://cancersexnetwork.org/">http://cancersexnetwork.org/</a>
Sexual advice association	<a href="http://www.sda.uk.net">www.sda.uk.net</a>
Sex Therapy Directory	<a href="http://www.sextherapydirectory.co.uk/">http://www.sextherapydirectory.co.uk/</a>

**Reading for patients**

Marty Klein. Sexual Intelligence, and Beyond Orgasm.

Sue Johnson, Hold Me Tight (pp.192-211).

Vicki Ford, Overcoming Sexual Problems.