Psychological support services for people affected by cancer
The psychological impact of cancer
The diagnosis and treatment of cancer can have a devastating impact on quality of life – not just for the individual, but also for their family and carers. People with cancer face uncertainty and often challenging life adjustments. They may also have to undergo unpleasant and sometimes debilitating treatments.

As a result, psychological distress – an understandable and natural response to any traumatic and threatening experience – is common among people affected by cancer.

Adjustment to diagnosis
While each person will experience their cancer differently, common emotional responses to a diagnosis of cancer include:

- worry or anxiety/fear
- low mood or depression
- hopelessness and helplessness
- anger, guilt or irritability
- shock, disbelief or denial.

Sometimes these feelings can persist for several weeks and start to impact on people’s day-to-day lives. And it is then that some people seek help.
Cancer treatment and side effects

The treatment for cancer can be physically and psychologically distressing. Typical side effects patients may experience include:

- nausea
- fatigue/extreme tiredness
- pain
- sleep difficulties
- changes in physical appearance
- sexual dysfunction
- cognitive impairment affecting memory and thinking skills.

The physical impact of your illness can also affect your emotions, especially when you have experienced the above side effects for a long period of time.

Life after treatment

The end of treatment can be a difficult time as people try to make sense of what has happened to them and readjust to their life. For some, it can be the first chance to look back on their journey from diagnosis and through treatment, which in itself can bring up a range of feelings.

It can also be challenging to adjust to new roles and relationships, and to live alongside a potential sense of uncertainty or vulnerability. Fears of recurrence can also surface at this time and impact on wellbeing.
The general oncology psychological care team

What services does the team offer?

We offer the opportunity to discuss any concerns you may have. You will also have a chance to apply proven self-help techniques to minimise treatment side effects and enhance quality of life, both during and after treatment.

We can help you with:

- Living with uncertainty
- Depression, anxiety and anger
- Coping with adjustment, change and loss
- Feeling unhappy about the way you look
- Coping with pain, discomfort, fatigue and treatment side effects
- Coping with how cancer affects your relationships and/or sexual functioning
- Coping with how cancer affects self-esteem and sense of self
- Coming to terms with possible end-of-life issues
- Talking to children about a cancer diagnosis
- Managing cognitive difficulties.

Seeing one of our team is just like seeing any other health professional in the cancer services, except that we are more focused on your psychological and emotional wellbeing. It does not mean that you are weak or mentally ill. Many of the concerns are common and are important to address. We can think together about different and effective ways of coping with your issues and concerns about having cancer.

Many people who have seen a psychologist or counsellor say it is helpful to discuss their situation in confidence with someone outside of the family.
How can I get to see someone from your team?
It is important that you raise your concerns with your clinical team if you feel that you are struggling with any of the issues mentioned in this leaflet.

To be referred to the service, a healthcare professional in your clinical team will need to complete a referral form and send it to uclh.opc@nhs.net. This can also be done by one of the support and information specialists in the Macmillan Support and Information Service at the University College Hospital Macmillan Cancer Centre.

If you feel you would like to see someone from our team but you have not been offered a referral, please feel free to speak to your healthcare team or one of the support and information specialists.

What happens once I have been referred?
After we receive your referral, we will discuss it at our weekly team meeting and allocate it to one of the team. We will then offer you an assessment appointment and send you an appointment letter. This will include the name of the team member you will see.

Your appointment will be with an experienced clinician (a clinical psychologist or a counsellor) who specialises in how cancer can affect your psychological wellbeing. You may also be seen by a trainee psychologist or counsellor – they are experienced mental health professionals supervised by members of our team.

Your appointment will usually last up to 60 minutes and you can attend it on your own or with a member of your family. It will take place on the lower ground floor of the Cancer Centre on Huntley Street. If you are an inpatient, we can meet with you on the ward.

After the assessment, we will propose a treatment plan if appropriate. This will be tailored to your needs and available on an individual, couple or group therapy basis. Please note that we offer a limited number of sessions for each patient, usually between one and six.
**What if I need support more urgently?**

Unfortunately, we are not able to provide a rapid response service if you feel that you are in the midst of a crisis. If you feel that you need to be seen sooner, please speak to your GP or, in the case of an emergency, visit your local Emergency Department (A&E).

You may also find it helpful to discuss your concerns with support charities, such as Macmillan (tel. 0808 808 0000) or Samaritans (tel. 116 123).

**Will you share information about me?**

As we are part of the wider clinical team, we will let the team looking after you know that you are under our care. Following your initial assessment, we will write to the healthcare professional who referred you, and also let your GP know. However, we will not disclose the details of what we have discussed without your permission. You will also receive a copy of this letter.

If you have any questions or concerns about information sharing, feel free to talk to us.

**Can I bring a family member to my appointment?**

Yes, we can see you with your partner or members of your family if this would help to address your psychological and emotional needs.

**Can I see a particular psychologist or counsellor?**

We will do our best to accommodate your choice; for example if you have seen a particular psychologist/counsellor in the past or if you have a preference for a male or female therapist. However, this is not always possible and may lengthen the time it takes for you to be seen.
Other sources of support

Cancer Support Group
The Cancer Support Group is open for everyone affected by cancer – patients, their families, carers and friends. It offers an opportunity to talk to others, share experiences or simply listen.

The support sessions take place on the fourth Wednesday of each month and are facilitated by the support and information specialists from the Macmillan Support and Information Service, with the support of the general oncology psychological care team. For more information, please call 020 3447 8663.

Macmillan Support and Information Service
The Macmillan Support and Information Service welcomes anyone affected by cancer, and their families and friends.

It offers emotional support and practical advice from experienced healthcare professionals, a range of information resources and a programme of support activities.

You don’t need an appointment to visit the service. The team will see you as quickly as possible.

The service is located on the ground floor of the University College Hospital Macmillan Cancer Centre (see the last page of this leaflet for full address).

Opening times:
Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm
Contact us

If you have any questions about our service or wish to discuss the possibility of a referral, please talk to a member of your clinical team or drop in to the Macmillan Support and Information Service:

University College Hospital Macmillan Cancer Centre
Huntley Street, London WC1E 6AG

You can also call us on 020 3447 8663.

If you need a large print, audio, braille, easy read, age-friendly or translated copy of this leaflet, please contact us on 020 3447 8663. We will do our best to meet your needs.