
Clinical Health Psychology

What is Clinical Health Psychology?

An area of psychology which specialises in helping people and their families cope with serious and/or chronic physical illness.

The experience of a health condition is more than just the physical aspects of the disease and its treatment. There are emotional effects too, such as feelings of fear, anger, sadness, worry, or depression, and these are quite normal. They may come and go or can seem to be there most of the time.

Sometimes emotional stress can be dealt with by the person themselves, with the support of their friends, families, and health care team. However, some people need more specialist support, and this is the role of Clinical Health Psychology.

What do Clinical/Counselling Psychologists working in health settings do?

We listen to patients' problems and concerns, and work together to focus on their strengths and resources to find ways to cope with the demands and effects of physical illness. We help patients to make sense of their situation, to develop new ways of coping, to cope with the uncertainty of future health and treatment, and to adjust to everyday life while living with the effect of their health problem. As well as being trained to provide specialist interventions with individuals, we also work with groups, and sometimes with families and carers.

There is a lot more to the job than individual therapy. We also provide consultation to medical professionals and attend clinical team meetings to help think about a patients' psychological needs. We work alongside staff teams to deliver teaching and training on psychological skills, but also to offer a supportive environment for colleagues to reflect on the demands of their work.

How do I train?

To become a Clinical Psychologist working in a health setting, you will need to complete a three-year Doctorate in Clinical Psychology. Currently there are 30 universities which offer this training, and the course is accredited by the British Psychological Society.

During training, you will undertake placements alongside clinical psychologists with different client groups, including older adults, people with intellectual disabilities, and children, teenagers and adults experiencing mental health difficulties. You will also have academic teaching, submit academic assignments, and carry out research. Currently the training is funded by the NHS, but this is constantly under review.

Counselling Psychologists also work in health settings and to become a Counselling Psychologist you will also need to complete a 3-year doctorate in Counselling Psychology. Please see the leaflet about Counselling Psychology for further information.

Entry Requirements

All training courses have slightly different requirements! But generally, courses will require:

- **An undergraduate degree in Psychology.** Most courses require a minimum of an upper second-class honours degree (2:1). However, some courses will accept trainees with a lower second class (2:2) honours degree if they have completed further study (such as a Masters degree) and can demonstrate their research ability.
- **Eligibility for a Graduate Basis for Chartered Membership (GBC) of the British Psychological Society.** Not all undergraduate degree courses offer this, so if you are thinking of a career in clinical psychology, you'll need to choose one that does.
- **Practical experience.** It is valuable to have experience of using psychological skills to work with people who are experiencing emotional and mental distress, and often courses will require at least 6 months of such experience.

Previous Experiences Required

There really is no right or wrong experience, but most courses will require you to have clinically relevant, and often paid, work experience. This can be in either a clinical or research setting where you've worked alongside people experiencing psychological distress. Examples of relevant work experience include support worker and healthcare assistant roles, assistant psychologist, research assistant, and Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) worker. Most courses also take relevant volunteering into account.

Career Prospects

Clinical/Counselling psychologists in health psychology settings can work across many different services, such as Oncology, Haematology, Pain, Gastroenterology, Palliative care, and Bariatrics. Some clinical/counselling psychologists will work in acute hospitals, while others will work in outpatient or community settings. Most clinical/counselling psychology jobs are based within the NHS, but posts are also offered within third sector organisations.

Any other relevant information

Questions often get asked about the difference between a clinical psychologist, counselling psychologist and health psychologist and we have discussed there further in the leaflet titled "FAQs/Differences amongst professions".

Useful Organisations

[British Psychological Society \(https://careers.bps.org.uk/area/clinical\)](https://careers.bps.org.uk/area/clinical)

[British Psychological Society \(https://careers.bps.org.uk/area/counselling\)](https://careers.bps.org.uk/area/counselling)

[Leeds Clearing House \(https://www.leeds.ac.uk/chpccp/\)](https://www.leeds.ac.uk/chpccp/)

[BPS Independent route for Counselling Psychology](https://www.bps.org.uk/psychologists/society-qualifications/qualification-counselling-psychology)

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