

# 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 (e.g. 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. (Please see our patient information leaflet on Art Psychotherapy PI70.)

### **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 think through with you how counselling may help. We can 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. Staff from the centre will often be able to offer you an appointment time for an initial assessment session
- someone in your health care team may refer you with your consent

If you have an appointment for counselling and for any reason you are unable to keep it, please let us know at least 24 hours in advance by calling the above helpline.

If you miss an assessment appointment without letting us know in advance, we are unable to offer it to anyone 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. Please note that there is a charge for parking at the hospital. There is 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 counselling 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 NHS 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. are used for the evaluation of the counselling service.

Please note that all information collected for evaluation is coded and completely anonymous i.e. 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, and **does not include details of your counselling 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**

The LJMC have produced a series of factsheets, available from the Centre, called 'Helpful Hints' such as:

- Coping with anxiety
- Living with tiredness (fatigue)
- Alcohol issues
- Moving onto Palliative care
- Getting help when an adult is bereaved
- Getting help when a child or young person is bereaved

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

### **Other help and support**

The Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre (LJMC) offers information and support to patients and their families and is located next to the Chemotherapy Suite by Gate 3. The staff at the LJMC work as part of the overall team caring for you.

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. Please feel free to drop in before, during and after any of your visits to Mount Vernon Cancer Centre to find out more about the LJMC services that you may find helpful.

The volunteers and healthcare professionals at the LJMC provide help, support and information in a relaxed setting to help patients cope with cancer and its treatment.

LJMC services include a range of complementary therapies, counselling, relaxation sessions and financial advice. You can drop in without an appointment or call the LJMC helpline on 020 3826 2555. More information is on the back of this leaflet.



## Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre

*... supporting people affected by cancer...*

- ① Drop-in centre for support and information
- ① Telephone helpline
- ① Complementary therapies\*
- ① Counselling\*
- ① Benefits advice\*
- ① Relaxation classes
- ① Look Good...Feel Better™ beauty workshops
- ① The Way Ahead headwear workshops
- ① Self-help courses

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

Please drop in or call to find out how we may be able to help you

Opening hours: **Mon-Fri: 9.30am-4.30pm**

Mount Vernon Cancer Centre, Northwood, Middlesex HA6 2RN

Telephone Helpline: **020 3826 2555**

Website: **[www.ljmc.org](http://www.ljmc.org)**

\* Service only available to NHS patients under the care of an oncologist based at Mount Vernon Cancer Centre

This publication has been produced by the Information team at the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre. Contributors include professionals, patients and carers from Mount Vernon Cancer Centre 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 LJMC on 020 3826 2555.

**Lynda Jackson**   
Macmillan Centre



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PI46 [blue] published 05/18  
review date 05/20