

Traumatic Stress Service

Springfield University Hospital

A Service User's Guide



Traumatic Stress Service: who we are

We provide specialist assessment and psychological treatment to those who are suffering severe distress and symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after traumatic events. Our aims are to help people reduce their distress, come to terms with their experiences and return to previous levels of well-being.

Our specialist service is led by a Consultant Clinical Psychologist, and consists of a team of skilled clinicians who have experience in trauma and its psychological treatment.

Traumatic events can include:

- Crime and violence (physical and sexual assault, domestic violence)
- State-sponsored violence (detention and torture, military and civil conflict)
- Man-made disasters (transport accidents, building collapses, house fires, and acts of terrorism)
- Natural disasters (earthquakes, floods, forest fires)
- Other traumatic events (traumatic medical procedures, witnessing someone die)



Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)



A person may be suffering from PTSD if they have witnessed or experienced an event that involved a serious threat to life or well-being.

Symptoms of PTSD commonly fall into three groups:

- Re-living the event in some way, for example, through unwanted thoughts, vivid intrusive memories or distressing nightmares; reminders of the event may also trigger thoughts about the trauma and lead to intense distress.
- Trying to avoid reminders of their trauma and/or feeling emotionally numb and detached.
- Persistent symptoms of anxiety, such as feeling constantly tense or irritable, being 'on edge' and jumpy.

These reactions are likely to disrupt many areas of day-to-day life, including work and social life as well as personal relationships.

In addition to these problems, changes in mood, including feeling very angry, depressed, guilty or ashamed are also common. Sometimes people use drugs and alcohol to try and 'forget' the memories of the traumatic event, and this can cause its own problems.

Assessments

People who we think will benefit from our service will be offered an assessment. The assessment may take more than one appointment. The assessment is where you can let us know how your traumatic experience has affected you.

If you would prefer to see a male or female clinician then please let us know in advance and we will try to meet your request. If you require an interpreter we can provide one for you.

After the assessment we can then make a joint decision as to what would be the best treatment for you. We will explain the treatments we offer so you can make an informed choice. Sometimes we may recommend that another service may be better for you.



Treatment

Our service provides evidence-based psychological treatments for PTSD. These treatments have been shown to be helpful in reducing symptoms and distress.



Psychological treatment involves making connections between thoughts, feelings and behaviour. After a trauma, many people find that their beliefs about themselves and the world have changed or “shattered”. This can lead to a decline in mood and activities. Often certain aspects or parts of the traumatic event will mean something very upsetting to the person. Treatment involves helping people think about these meanings to enable them to come to terms with what they have been through.

People with PTSD usually find that many memories, conversations, and real-life situations remind them of their traumatic experiences, and cause them to feel extremely distressed and anxious. They may find themselves avoiding anything that is a reminder, and over time doing less of the things they used to value or enjoy.

The main component of therapy is talking about the traumatic experience in detail with a therapist. Initially this process can be very upsetting. However, over time, confronting and retelling traumatic

experiences can lead to lower anxiety and less distressing memories. People are also helped to gradually confront activities and situations that provoke anxiety and are being avoided. When someone repeatedly confronts frightening situations, their anxiety comes down and the person becomes less frightened.



The format of your treatment will be individually tailored to you, based on a thorough psychological assessment. It will be negotiated collaboratively with you and your therapist. The length of treatment varies according to need. However, generally people are seen for between 15 to 20 appointment sessions of 60 to 90 minutes. These may be on a weekly or fortnightly basis. Treatment is generally most effective if you also do assignments between sessions.

Towards the end of treatment you and your therapist may negotiate a longer time span between sessions. Intensive treatments are also sometimes offered, where you have the same number of sessions but meet every day for one or two weeks. These can be helpful if you find it hard to take time off for sessions every week.

If you are getting help from other services for example, members of the Community Mental Health Team, or Social Services then your therapist will liaise with them to make sure you are getting the best care. You may be taking medication prescribed by your GP or Psychiatrist. Continuing to take your medication (such as anti-depressants) alongside therapy can be extremely helpful.

Confidentiality

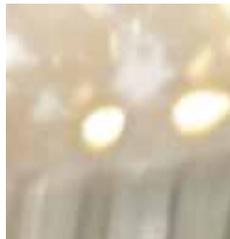
We respect your right to confidentiality. However, as a responsible service we are obliged to share some information you give us, as and when it is essential. For example, we routinely share information within our team in order to make the best decisions for your care. We also will keep your GP, the referrer and other professionals involved (eg your Social Worker) informed of the outcome of the assessment and treatment. Your therapist will be happy to discuss any concerns you may have about confidentiality in more detail.



When you cannot make an appointment

In order for the treatment to be effective, regular attendance is required. However, sometimes you may be unable to make an appointment and wish to rearrange the time. If so, then we ask that you contact us to let us know before the appointment. As we are a busy service we would appreciate that you try and contact us as soon as possible to enable us to offer the appointment time to someone else. The heavy demand for appointments in the service means that we operate a strict attendance policy.

Similarly, if you have received an initial assessment appointment and you no longer require our service, please let us know as soon as possible so that we can offer it to someone else.



When English is not your first language

We regularly work with interpreters where clients cannot speak English at all, or when English is not their first language. Please tell us in advance if you would like us to arrange an interpreter for you.



Contact details

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020 3513 6305
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How to find us

The nearest tube station to Springfield Hospital is Tooting Bec (Northern Line), a 12-15 minute walk.

Bus G1 serves Springfield Hospital itself. On nearby Trinity Road there are buses 219 and 319. On Upper Tooting Road there are buses 57, 155, 219 and 355. On Tooting Bec Road there are buses 249 and 319.

Parking is available on the hospital site but you need to collect a parking permit from the Gate House.