

Health psychology in applied settings

A guide for employees



- Find out more about the role of a health psychologist
- Discover the variety of work health psychologists do
- Learn what training a health psychologist undertakes



The role

What is a health psychologist?

Health psychologists are experts in applying psychological knowledge, research and interventions to promote and improve health and the health care system and to inform health policy. They work with patients, carers/family, healthy community members and health care professionals, in groups, with individuals and with organisations.

Where do we use our skills and support other health professions?

Health psychologists work in a wide range of areas relating to health, illness, and health care. These include:

- **Health promotion and behaviour change:** Promoting health by applying evidence-based interventions for primary prevention of illness or disease, for example sexual health (in areas such as healthy eating, physical activity, substance use and sexual health).
- **Health service improvement:** Improving effectiveness of health care systems (for instance increasing uptake of service use, for example cervical screening).
- **Chronic illness/condition management:** Helping people to deal more effectively with illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes and cancer, including helping them to deal with normal emotional reactions to illness. This can improve their quality of life.
- **Expert advice or consultancy:** Helping health professionals and patients, for example gathering evidence to improve services such as pain or weight management.
- **Research:** Health psychologists have advanced skills in a variety of research methods, which enables them to conduct research, provide expert advice or collaborate on a study, for example studying the links between stress and health.
- **Teaching and communication:** For example training health professionals on how to deliver an intervention to help promote healthy eating, or deliver training in communication skills such as how to break bad news, or support behaviour change. This can also enhance practitioner–patient relationships and adherence to treatment.

The variety of work

Below are some examples of the types of positions held by health psychologists within applied settings such as the NHS and private practice.

Consultant Health Psychologist: Taking a lead for health psychology within public health, including managing tobacco control and smoking cessation services and providing professional leadership in the management of Health Trainers.

Principal Health Psychologist: Leading the health psychology service within one of the UK's leading heart and lung hospitals, providing a clinical service to patients and advising all members of the multidisciplinary team.

Health Psychologist: Providing health psychology input to a centre for weight management. Psychological assessment of treatment, development and delivery of a tailored weight management programme, and advising on approaches to improve adherence to health advice and medical treatment.

Research Psychologist: Carrying out health psychology research, for example exploring the psychological impact of receiving a diagnosis of dementia, or evaluating ways of providing psychological support for people with burn injuries. Research can also be in the area of health promotion, for example investigating the determinants of healthy eating or physical activity or understanding why people misuse substances.

Health Psychologist in Training/Assistant Health Psychologist: Assessing patients, delivering psychological interventions to change health behaviours and conducting research, whilst being supervised by a qualified health psychologist.

The training and competencies

What training does a health psychologist receive?

Registered Health Psychologists who are Chartered psychologists with the British Psychological Society (BPS) will have undertaken a minimum of six years of training and will have specialised in health psychology for a minimum of three years. Once qualified, health psychologists can work in a range of settings, for example the NHS, universities, schools, private healthcare, research and charitable organisations.

A health psychologist in training might be working within applied settings whilst working towards registration and chartered status.

A health psychologist will have demonstrated competencies in all of the following areas:

- **Professional skills:** Including implementing ethical and legal standards, communication and team work.
- **Research skills:** Including designing, conducting and analysing psychological research in numerous areas.
- **Consultancy skills:** Including planning and evaluation.
- **Teaching and training skills:** Including knowledge of designing, delivering and evaluating large and small scale training programmes.
- **Intervention skills:** Including delivery and evaluation of behaviour change interventions.

Find out more at:

www.bps.org.uk/dhp



The British
Psychological Society
Division of Health Psychology