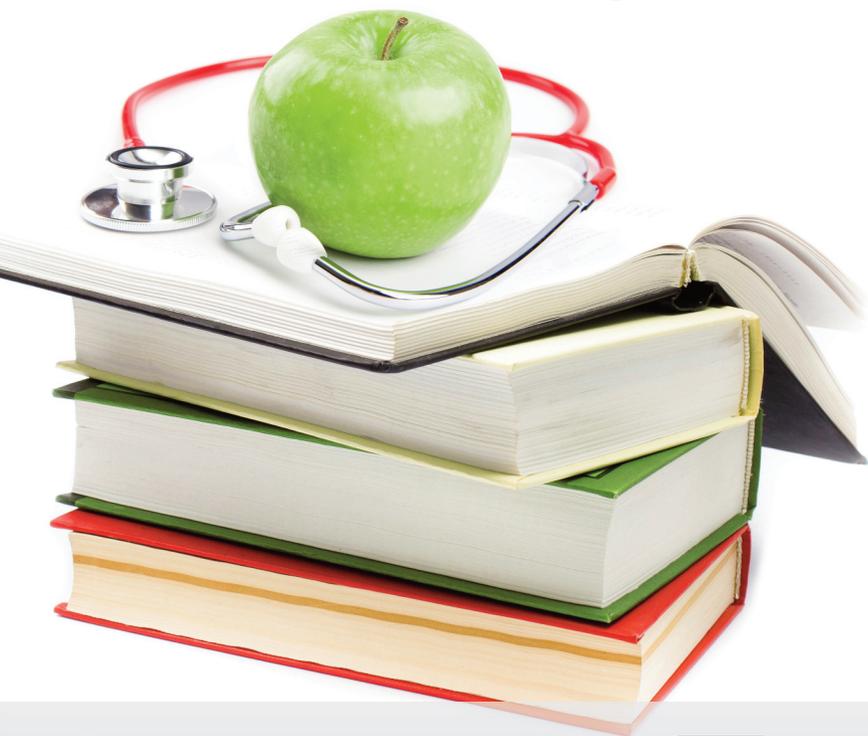


**The British
Psychological Society**
Promoting excellence in psychology

A career in health psychology

A guide for students



Find out more at:

www.bps.org.uk/dhp



**The British
Psychological Society**
Division of Health Psychology

What is a health psychologist?

Health psychologists are specially trained to help people deal with the psychological and emotional aspects of health and illness. They use their knowledge of psychology and health to promote general well-being and understand physical illness.

Health psychologists promote healthier lifestyles and try to find ways to encourage people to improve their health. For example, they may help people to lose weight or stop smoking.

Health psychologists also use their skills to try to improve the healthcare system. For example, they may advise doctors about better ways to communicate with their patients.

Who do health psychologists work with?

Everyone! Health affects everybody, so health psychologists work with people of all backgrounds and ages for example: patients, carers, families, healthy people and health care professionals, such as doctors and nurses. They may work with older adults, pregnant teenagers or people with a particular condition, such as back pain or irritable bowel syndrome.

Health psychologists work with people on a one-to-one basis, in groups, as a family, or at a larger population level.

Where do health psychologists work?

Health psychologists work in many different settings including hospitals, private practices, universities, government, local authorities, communities, schools and organisations. They may deal with problems identified by healthcare agencies, including NHS Trusts and health authorities.

What sort of work do health psychologists do?

Helping people to lead a healthy life

- Health psychologists develop and deliver interventions and services to people which can help them make changes in their lives, such as stopping smoking, reducing the amount of alcohol they drink, eating more healthily, and taking regular exercise.
- Health psychologists also find ways to try to help people to avoid risky behaviours that may affect their health and well-being, such as unprotected sex.

Helping people to deal with chronic illness

- Health psychologists develop and deliver interventions and services that can provide people with the information, support and skills to help them to adjust and cope with the emotional and physical impact of illnesses, such as cancer, diabetes and chronic pain. These programmes may be delivered face-to-face or using digital technology, such as the internet or mobile phones.

Helping to improve the healthcare system

- Health psychologists deliver training to other health professionals to improve their communication and psychological skills. For example, teaching doctors how to best deliver bad news to their patients.
- Some illnesses can be treated better if they are caught early. Health psychologists have worked to understand why some people do not go for screening or immunisations. They are finding ways to encourage people to have health checks for illnesses, such as cancer or heart disease.

Conducting research

Health psychologists carry out research to answer questions, including:

- How are stress and poor sleep linked to negative health outcomes?
- What are the emotional effects of genetic testing?
- How can we encourage and help people to change their behaviour to improve their health?
- What are the experiences of carers of people with dementia?
- Are smartphone applications that help people to manage their chronic pain effective?

How do I become one?

To become a Chartered psychologist through training in health psychology you will need:

- **Graduate Basis for Chartered Membership (GBC)**. This is achieved by completing a British Psychological Society (BPS) accredited degree or conversion course; *AND*
- A Society accredited **Masters in Health Psychology (Stage 1)**; *AND*
- The Society's Qualification in **Health Psychology (Stage 2)**, which involves a minimum of two years supervised practice. This is often referred to as the 'independent route' which is at doctoral level; *OR*
- A Society accredited **Doctorate in Health Psychology**.

Becoming a Chartered psychologist reflects the highest standard of psychological knowledge and expertise, allowing the use of the designated title 'CPsychol'.

Further information about the health psychology training route can be found at www.bps.org.uk/careers.

At a glance

Health psychologists...

- are specially trained to help people deal with the psychological and emotional aspects of health and illness;
- work with people of all backgrounds and ages in many different settings;
- help people to change behaviour, e.g. to eat healthily or stop smoking, and live with illnesses such as diabetes, cancer or arthritis;
- use ideas from psychology to help them promote general well-being and understand physical illness; and
- work with people on a one-to-one basis, in groups, as a family, or with big populations.



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