



What is a psychiatrist and how do they work?

A psychiatrist is a medically qualified doctor. He or she will have had specialist training and experience with a wide range of mental disorders.

Most psychiatrists work as part of a team. This can include nurses, social workers, occupational therapists and psychologists.

Your first appointment

This will usually take about 1 hour. The psychiatrist will ask you about:

- your current problem
- why you have come to see them now
- your past life and how you are living now
- your physical health
- your thoughts and feelings
- how you get on with other people.

It can feel like a lot of questions – and it may not be obvious as to why the psychiatrist needs to ask them. But they are asked to help the psychiatrist understand your situation as clearly as possible.

Tips

- Do ask the psychiatrist to explain anything that is unclear to you.
- You may find it helpful to write down some questions before the appointment.
- You might want to ask about what to do in a crisis or who you can get hold of outside working hours.
- Do bring a list of any medication that you are already taking.
- If you'd like a family member or friend to come with you, let the clinic know so that the appointment can be made a bit longer.



What might happen next

The psychiatrist may not be able to give you a diagnosis at your first appointment, but will be able to talk over the possibilities with you.

He or she might offer one of the following.

- An antidepressant, an antipsychotic or a mood stabiliser.
- Talking therapies. These include cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) and individual or group psychotherapies.
- Advice on practical ways to cope with your problem.
- Advice about healthy living – exercise, diet and how to organise your day.
- A referral to another service.
- Another appointment with the psychiatrist or another team member.
- To advise your GP.
- If you are very unwell, you might be offered immediate treatment either at home or in hospital. If your psychiatrist feels this is necessary, they will talk this over with you.

Future appointments

You may not always see the same psychiatrist. If you see one of the team members regularly, they will work closely with your psychiatrist. The team may discuss your treatment at regular meetings to make sure that you are getting the best help.



Confidentiality

The information you give to the psychiatrist is confidential to the clinical team involved in your treatment. They must ask for your permission before that information can be shared with anyone else.

There are a few times when they may have to share information about you even when you do not want them to. This might happen if you or another person, particularly if this was a child or young person, were at risk of serious harm.

If you are a parent, the mental health team and children's staff will work hard to support you and your children. They will want to develop your family's strengths and resources. If you want to know more about this, ask about *Think Child, Think Parent, Think Family* (a guide for parents and children with mental health problems and their carers; see www.hscboard.hscni.net).

Carers

Family and friends are often the people who know you best and can often help. They may be able to support you, keep an eye on your physical health and help out with managing any tablets.

You may want a family member or friend to come with you when you see the psychiatrist. They may have questions of their own about what has happened or about how they can get help and support for themselves.



The Royal College of Psychiatrists produces a wide range of mental health information including

Physical health

The psychiatrist will not usually do a full physical examination. They might take your pulse or your blood pressure.

They might also ask for other investigations such as bloods to be taken.

If you are admitted to hospital, you should have a full physical examination.

Professional boundaries

Psychiatrists have guidelines on how they should behave with service users and carers. They have to follow the rules and guidelines set out by the General Medical Council. See www.gmc-uk.org for more information.

Complaints

Each health and social care trust will have a complaints procedure, so if you are unhappy with your treatment or care, ask for details on how to make a complaint.

CHECKLISTS

for people with mental health problems

questions to ask your psychiatrist

for carers of people with mental health problems

questions to ask your psychiatrist

for psychiatrists

issues of concern to carers of people with mental illness

for professionals

coming in contact with children of parents with mental health problems

for parents

with children with mental health problems

LEAFLETS

on common mental health problems and factsheets on treatments in psychiatry such as antidepressants and cognitive-behavioural therapy

All of the above can be downloaded from:

www.rcpsych.ac.uk/info

www.partnersincare.co.uk

This leaflet may be downloaded free of charge from www.rcpsych.ac.uk/northernireland

This leaflet was produced by the Joint Committee of Service Users, Carers and Psychiatrists in Northern Ireland as part of the Royal College of Psychiatrists' Fair Deal Campaign, which is working towards equality for people with mental health problems

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So, you've
been
referred to
a psychiatrist...

Many people worry about being referred to a psychiatrist

This might seem daunting, but one in four of us will have a mental health problem at some time in our lives

Modern treatments are very effective

This leaflet is about what to expect at your first appointment