
Liaison Psychiatry

Royal College of Psychiatrists Higher Specialty
Curriculum (Sub-Specialty Endorsement)

Version 1.0

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Purpose Statement

Liaison Psychiatry is the sub-speciality of psychiatry concerned with clinical practice, teaching and research in medical settings; the liaison referred to is therefore between psychiatry and other clinical disciplines.¹ Specialists in Liaison Psychiatry assess, manage and treat people with co-morbid physical and mental health problems across the age range. They have expertise in the relationship between physical illness, psychological distress and social adversities.

Liaison Psychiatry services have been rapidly expanding across the country following an economic evaluation demonstrating the cost effectiveness of mental health care in physical health settings. Evidence shows a list of benefits including reduction in psychological distress, improved service user experience, improved dementia care, decreased length of stay and enhanced knowledge and skill of general hospital clinicians.²³ Liaison Psychiatry services can improve the care of patients with medically unexplained symptoms and long term physical conditions in both acute hospital and primary care settings.⁴⁵

The NHS Five Year Forward View plan for England is on track to implement the ambition of providing all acute hospitals with age appropriate mental health liaison teams, of which at least 50% will meet the 'Core 24' service standard as a minimum.⁶ The NHS Long Term Plan for England has pledged to maintain this commitment that all general hospitals will have mental health liaison services, with 70% of these hospitals meeting the 'core 24' standard for adults and older adults by 2023/24.⁷

The Welsh Government's ten-year strategy to improve mental health and well-being has determined a range of areas that require attention.⁸ This includes providing better perinatal mental health care; ensuring each health board has crisis services available seven days a week; the establishment of effective mental health psychiatric liaison capacity for district general hospitals; and addressing mental health/substance misuse needs of frequent attenders of emergency departments.

The Scottish Mental Health Strategy has identified the need to shift the balance of care towards mental health.⁹ The Strategy highlights the crucial need to fund

¹ [Organisation and Delivery of Liaison Psychiatry Services in General Hospitals in England](#), Walker et Al, 2018.

² [Parsonage M and Fossey M. Economic evaluation of a liaison psychiatry service](#). Centre for Mental Health, 2011.

³ [An Evidence Base for Liaison Psychiatry – Guidance](#) Strategic Clinical Network for Mental Health, Dementia and Neurological Conditions South West, 2014.

⁴ [Liaison Psychiatry For Every Acute Hospital, Integrated Mental and physical healthcare](#). Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2013.

⁵ [Parsonage M, Hard E and Rock B. Managing Patients with Complex Needs: Evaluation of the City and Hackney Primary Care Psychotherapy Consultation Service](#). Centre for Mental Health, 2014.

⁶ [The Five Year Forward View for Mental Health](#). NHS England, 2016 (p30).

⁷ [The NHS Long Term Plan](#). NHS, 2019.

⁸ [Together for Mental Health](#). Welsh Government, 2012.

⁹ [Mental Health Strategy 2017-2027](#). Scottish Government, 2017.

Liaison services and work in partnership with the NHS to increase the provision of specialist Liaison Psychiatry services available for acute patients.

Northern Ireland has higher levels of mental ill health than any other region in the UK.¹⁰ It has been emphasised that building up the range of specialist mental health services is required to meet need;¹¹ policy details that a focus on the interface between mental and physical health is required to see drastic improvement in treatment and the economic effectiveness of acute hospital care.

Given the status of Liaison Psychiatry across the United Kingdom, there is hence a clear need to train more consultant psychiatrists with specialist knowledge and skills in Liaison Psychiatry to meet patient and service need.¹²

An endorsement in Liaison Psychiatry will be awarded alongside successful completion of a CCT in either General Adult Psychiatry or Old Age Psychiatry. This can include dual training programmes with either General Adult or Old Age components. It is recommended that the training is undertaken over 12 months (Whole Time Equivalent), in order to achieve the required capabilities and gain the necessary experience.

The purpose of this training curriculum is to enable the Consultant Liaison Psychiatrist to specialise in the assessment, diagnosis, treatment, management and prevention of mental disorders in adults/older adults in non-psychiatric environments. This includes evidence-based psychological, biomedical and social interventions in a wide range of physical health care settings.

The curriculum builds on the clinical capabilities attained in Core and Higher Psychiatry training such as advanced communication and interpersonal skills, examination skills, diagnosis and treatment to a mastery level. It also involves the further development of capabilities such as leadership and management, teaching, research and quality improvement. This curriculum provides a framework for training and enables the achievement of essential sub-specialty-specific clinical and generic professional capabilities.

This is acquired through the development of the professional values, behaviours, knowledge and skills to provide high-quality, evidence-based patient care in physical health care settings.

Trainees will be expected to work in an approved Liaison Psychiatry post to ensure experience and capabilities in a variety of physical health care clinical settings such as the acute hospital, primary care and specialist medical and surgical inpatient and outpatient environments. A Consultant Liaison Psychiatrist will be able to work with the whole range of acute and long-term mental health conditions for the whole range of adult/older adult patients in these settings.

Further curricula are available for the following other established psychiatry specialties:

- Child & Adolescent Psychiatry
- Forensic Psychiatry

¹⁰ [Making Life Better](#). Northern Ireland Assembly, 2014.

¹¹ [Quality 2020; A 10-Year strategy to protect and improve quality in health and social care in Northern Ireland](#). Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, 2011.

¹² [The NHS Long Term Plan](#). NHS, 2019.

- Intellectual (Learning) Disability Psychiatry
- Medical Psychotherapy
- Old Age Psychiatry

The Liaison Psychiatry Curriculum has widespread interdependencies which include the General Adult and Old Age Psychiatry curricula and builds on the capabilities outlined in Core Psychiatry. During training in Liaison Psychiatry, a trainee develops the knowledge and skills needed to have overall responsibility, lead a team, understand governance and overall structures. In addition to this, a trainee learns how to use the knowledge and capabilities gained through previous training to function within physical health settings, such as a general hospital, taking into account the complexities of the system and the needs of their staff. An in-depth understanding of the physical health care environment is essential for safe delivery of care. Due to this unique position, experience in service development and an understanding of the working of the wider health economy is an important aspect of training.

The training will provide appropriate development of transferable skills and experience (e.g. advanced leadership, emergency psychiatry and complex decision making), as well as specialised skills and experience in Liaison Psychiatry, such as assessment and management of medically unexplained symptoms and mental health problems in patients with long term conditions.

The Liaison Psychiatry learning outcomes are mapped to the Generic Professional Capabilities Framework (GPCs) ensuring ease of transfer between medical specialties. Through the attainment of the High-Level Learning Outcomes (HLOs), this curriculum enables trainees to lead and work in multidisciplinary and multi-professional teams, provide leadership, and participate in research, teaching and training at the interface of physical and mental health. It will also enable trainees gain experience in formulating integrated psychological, bio-medical and social, person-centred management plans for a range of mental health presentations within physical health care settings.

This purpose statement has been endorsed by the GMC's Curriculum Oversight Group and confirmed as meeting the needs of the health services of the countries of the UK.

Liaison Psychiatry Curriculum

The below table outlines the High Level Outcomes (HLOs) and Key Capabilities (KCs) to be achieved under 16 key themes.

By the end of the endorsement in Liaison Psychiatry you will:

GPC	High Level Outcomes (HLOs)	Themes	Key Capabilities (KCs)
1	<p>Demonstrate the professional values and behaviours required of a Consultant Psychiatrist with reference to Good Medical Practice, Core Values for Psychiatrists (CR204) and other relevant faculty guidance.</p>	<p>1a) Professional Relationships</p>	<p>Consistently demonstrate a holistic and person-centred (which includes biological, psychological and social) clinical approach to patients in liaison psychiatry settings that is honest, empathic, compassionate, and respects their dignity while maintaining therapeutic optimism, and boundaries.</p> <p>Work collaboratively with patients, families, carers of all ages and colleagues respecting their autonomy, diversity and valuing their contribution.</p> <p>Manage the complexities of diversity.</p> <p>Recognise, validate and actively address systemic and structural inequalities, intersectionality, and their impact on clinical outcomes for patients and their carers of all ages and on working relationships with colleagues.</p> <p>Demonstrate the ability to be flexible, lead, use initiative, be able to prioritise, and be adaptable.</p>
		<p>1b) Professional Standards</p>	<p>Consistently demonstrate a positive and conscientious approach to the completion of your work.</p> <p>Understand the impact of workload, patient and organisational dynamics on your own well-being.</p> <p>Develop strategies to take care of your wellbeing, seeking timely support and guidance.</p>

Recognise the importance of reflective practice towards understanding the emotional impact of the work on the individual and team, including the impact of suicide and homicide.

Use supervision and reflection effectively recognising your skills, limitations and your duty of candour.

Make clear, accurate and contemporaneous records.

Act as an ambassador to promote mental health in physical health care settings including acting as an advocate for your patients and their carers.

Effectively use available technologies where appropriate and necessary, taking into account knowledge of their complexities and limitations.

Demonstrate the capacity to adapt practice to changing circumstances, clinical models, evolution of scientific knowledge to improve patient care.

Maintain appropriate professional standards while working clinically, as a leader within healthcare organisations.

Work autonomously and collaboratively to provide clinical leadership and psychological understanding to MDT colleagues.

Develop a supportive professional and clinical network to enable you to work autonomously as a Liaison Psychiatrist.

Develop safe, confidential settings as a secure base for clinical work in physical healthcare settings.

Uphold the need for confidentiality in information sharing towards maintaining a high standard of patient care whilst allowing privacy to be maintained.

Raise and address issues of patient safety and quality of care in a timely manner.

			<p>Demonstrate proficiency in the use of technologies where appropriate in psychiatric practice.</p>
<p>2</p>	<p>Demonstrate advanced communication and interpersonal skills when engaging with patients, their families, carers of all ages, their wider community, colleagues and other professionals.</p>	<p>2a) Communication</p>	<p>Demonstrate advanced communication and interpersonal skills when engaging with patients in physical healthcare settings, their families, carers of all ages and healthcare professionals.</p> <p>Reflect your understanding of how patient values and perspectives may differ in a physical health setting and the influence this may have on engagement, assessment, treatment and management, ensuring a shared approach.</p> <p>Explain a range of psychological therapies to patients, families, carers of all ages, and other professionals and organise subsequent management appropriately.</p> <p>Understand the pressures on healthcare professionals in physical healthcare settings, and the impact this may have on values and perspectives, and on assessment and management.</p> <p>Communicate complex person-centred holistic (which includes biological, psychological, and social) concepts in communication with others.</p> <p>Demonstrate skills in supporting those in whom English is not their first language, including the use of interpreters, and providing information in other languages.</p> <p>Demonstrate the ability to use and adapt new and emerging and changing technologies where appropriate and understand the limitations.</p> <p>Communicate risk assessments effectively and succinctly to other healthcare professionals.</p> <p>Reflect on the different communication needs of patients, families, carers of all ages, primary and secondary care professionals, mental health teams and social services, and tailor your communication accordingly.</p>

			<p>Demonstrate proficiency in communicating potentially distressing diagnostic and prognostic information associated with the overlap with physical and mental health, with patients, families, carers of all ages, and clinicians.</p> <p>Maintain therapeutic optimism and hope.</p> <p>Demonstrate proficiency in managing conflict involving patients, professionals, teams and systems.</p> <p>Utilise psychotherapeutic skills in assisting staff groups in other disciplines in the management of complex situations.</p>
	<p>Demonstrate advanced skills in the psychiatric assessment, formulation, diagnosis and person-centred holistic* management of an appropriate range of presentations in a variety of clinical and non-clinical settings within Liaison Psychiatry.</p>	<p>2b) Clinical Skills</p>	<p>Demonstrate advanced skills in person-centred holistic (which includes biological, psychological and social) assessment, investigation, formulation and diagnosis of mental disorders in physical health care settings.</p> <p>Demonstrate detailed knowledge of epidemiology and common presentations of psychiatric and psychological problems in physical health care settings.</p> <p>Demonstrate proficiency in the use of relevant questionnaires and screening tools in the liaison psychiatry setting and their limitations.</p> <p>Identify and diagnose mental disorders in physical healthcare settings.</p> <p>Use physical healthcare records to develop a systematic chronology of a patient's history to aid assessment.</p> <p>Perform a detailed assessment of cognitive function taking into account the limitations of the setting and physical health of the patient.</p> <p>Assess patients on busy wards and in the emergency department (ED) respecting patient dignity and confidentiality.</p> <p>Demonstrate a flexible approach in assessment, taking into account the patient's current physical health status.</p>

Where required, undertake a physical examination.

Assess the general health of your patients, taking into account the impact of their physical health on their mental health needs and vice versa. This assessment should include consideration of nutritional, metabolic, and endocrine factors and disorders, and the physical and mental impact of substance use and addiction on clinical presentation.

Assess those from a range of different cultural, spiritual, and religious backgrounds and demonstrate an understanding of how [protected characteristics](#) may impact on clinical presentation.

Integrate information from multiple sources to develop a formulation.

Correctly interpret the results of physical examination and investigations.

Liaise and discuss additional investigations with colleagues in the multi-professional team in order to utilise investigations appropriately.

Carry out a comprehensive assessment of risk including: self-harm, suicide; violence; exploitation; neglect; environmental risk; unintentional physical harm, elder abuse.

Work collaboratively with patients and health care professionals to develop integrated person-centred holistic (which includes psychological, biological and social) management plans for a range of mental health presentations within physical health care settings.

Demonstrate up to date knowledge of the risk and benefits of psychotropic medication and safely prescribe it in patients with physical health challenges.

Understand the changes related to ageing, or of a compromised brain and body, and adapt treatment strategies accordingly.

Work collaboratively to develop and deliver a management plan for patients with functional symptoms and long-term physical conditions with the

individual and their healthcare team, sustaining a therapeutic relationship over a period of time to enable its implementation.

Arrange appropriate follow up when required to provide continuity of care.

Manage psychiatric emergencies in the physical health care setting including emergency use of medication, rapid tranquilisation, use of restraint and post event management aspects.

Develop and negotiate safe, effective and compassionate risk management plans with patients, their families, carers of all ages, and other health care professionals.

Use formulation to devise a safe, effective, collaborative and co-productive management plans to ensure continuity of care in the immediate, short and longer term.

Demonstrate knowledge of evidence-based psychological treatments and use these skills in the assessment and management of patients in a liaison psychiatry setting.

Manage at least one supervised psychotherapy case, using an appropriate psychotherapy modality, drawn from the liaison psychiatry setting.

Be familiar with and adept with terminology used in physical healthcare settings.

Use a detailed knowledge of contemporary classification systems to understand presentations in physical healthcare settings, including functional symptoms and long-term physical health conditions.

Demonstrate proficiency in initiating, changing, discontinuing psychotropic medication, including advising colleagues who don't have a mental health care background, and be aware of limitations and interactions.

			<p>Work across interfaces, between psychiatric, and other medical and non-medical specialties and services, demonstrating appropriate liaison and collaboration.</p> <p>Offer psychiatric expertise and guidance to other practitioners (e.g. through consultation or clinical supervision) to provide alternative perspectives for understanding and treatment.</p> <p>Demonstrate involvement and contribution to multi-professional management of patients' needs and risks.</p>
	<p>Apply advanced management skills within Liaison Psychiatry in situations of uncertainty, conflict and complexity across a wide range of clinical and non-clinical contexts.</p>	<p>2c) Complexity & Uncertainty</p>	<p>Identify, understand, and negotiate complexity and uncertainty in a wide range of clinical and non-clinical contexts.</p> <p>Demonstrate awareness of diagnostic uncertainty, and ability to manage this when appropriate.</p> <p>Recognise and manage clinical uncertainty, ambiguity, complex co-morbidities of mental and physical illness, including risks associated with various presentations.</p> <p>Recognise and manage unconscious dynamics between yourself, your patients, the liaison team, and other healthcare teams.</p> <p>Deviate from care pathways/guidelines when clinically indicated.</p> <p>Understand the limits of your clinical capabilities, seeking timely support and consultation when appropriate.</p> <p>Manage divergent views about patient care or intervention and deliver appropriate interventions.</p> <p>Prioritise information in situations of urgency and demonstrate expertise in applying the principles of crisis intervention in emergency situations. Be able to make urgent care plans and maintain professionalism.</p>

			<p>Observe, absorb, contain and reflect on complex clinical/non-clinical situations in liaison psychiatry, develop a balanced response, and support colleagues to do likewise.</p> <p>Demonstrate an understanding of individual variation and the impact of social and cultural, factors, including effects of deprivation, discrimination and racism.</p> <p>Review treatment and management plans of patients when the outcome is not as expected or hoped for.</p>
<p>3</p>	<p>Apply advanced knowledge of relevant legislative frameworks across the UK to safeguard patients and safely manage risk within Liaison Psychiatry.</p>	<p><i>3a) Knowledge of legal and organisational frameworks in your UK jurisdiction</i></p>	<p>Demonstrate understanding of and apply the current legislation governing the care and treatment of people with mental disorder in physical healthcare settings.</p> <p>Demonstrate advanced practical knowledge and application of the relevant mental health legislation, including the use of emergency powers and compulsory treatment aspects in physical healthcare settings.</p> <p>Demonstrate advanced practical knowledge and application of the relevant mental capacity legislation, in physical healthcare settings.</p> <p>Balance the duty of care to the patient and the protection of others with the restriction of human rights when considering the use of legal powers.</p> <p>Demonstrate understanding of the current national standards, policies and guidelines in relation to the mental health and social care needs of patients in physical health care settings.</p> <p>Understand models of consultation within liaison psychiatry and emergency working sufficiently to explain and negotiate with physical and mental health care colleagues and managers.</p>

	Work effectively within the structure and organisation of the NHS, and the wider health and social care landscape.	<i>3b) Working within NHS and organisational structures</i>	<p>Demonstrate working knowledge of local health and social care services through your interactions with them.</p> <p>Demonstrate awareness and understanding of clinical governance structures in physical health care settings.</p> <p>Awareness of interfaces between Liaison Psychiatry and other psychiatric specialties, other branches of medicine and other service providers, including social services.</p>
4	Demonstrate leadership and advocacy in mental and physical health promotion and illness prevention for patients within Liaison Psychiatry and the wider community.	<i>4a) Health promotion and illness prevention in community settings</i>	<p>Demonstrate and apply an understanding of the factors contributing to health inequalities, and the social and cultural determinants of mental health in physical healthcare settings.</p> <p>Identify and challenge stigma and discrimination against people with mental disorders in physical healthcare settings.</p> <p>Demonstrate understanding of public health issues related to mental and physical health; work collaboratively with colleagues within physical health disciplines, and other agencies to promote mental well-being and quality of life.</p> <p>Engage with patients, families and carers of all ages and the wider community around health promotion and illness prevention, and design and delivery of services, to co-produce a safe and effective treatment plan.</p>
5	Demonstrate effective team working and leadership skills to work constructively and collaboratively within the complex health and social care systems that support people with mental disorder.	<i>5a) Teamworking</i>	<p>Show an awareness of how individual personal qualities, emotions and behaviours of both yourself and teams whom you work with, impact on team functioning and the quality of patient care, and manage appropriately.</p> <p>Demonstrate a working knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of, and the interface between, multidisciplinary team members in physical healthcare settings.</p>

			<p>Use effective negotiation skills to resolve conflict and dysfunction.</p> <p>Participate and contribute to the work and success of a team, including managing change.</p> <p>Demonstrate proficiency in the use of negotiating skills with medical and surgical colleagues and managers in physical healthcare settings.</p>
		5b) Leadership	<p>Appraise the leadership skills of others in various healthcare settings and contexts.</p> <p>Apply your own leadership skills in a variety of clinical and non-clinical settings.</p> <p>Understand how your own leadership style and approach impact on others, adapt your approach to meet the needs of the team.</p> <p>Demonstrate willingness to lead, take charge, and offer opinions and direction.</p> <p>Support colleagues to enhance their performance and support their development.</p> <p>Provide clinical supervision to colleagues at all times.</p> <p>Demonstrate inclusive leadership style and awareness of the impact of hierarchy and power within relationships with patients and colleagues.</p> <p>Competently manage and lead a team/service, providing consultation and specialist advice to team members, medical and surgical colleagues and managers in physical healthcare settings, and other agencies.</p>

6	Identify, promote and lead activity to improve the safety and quality of patient care and clinical outcomes of a person with mental disorder.	6a) Patient safety	<p>Ensure high standards of clinical governance in both mental and physical healthcare settings addressing patient safety concerns in physical healthcare settings.</p> <p>Reflect and learn from all incidents.</p>
		6b) Quality improvement	<p>Undertake/lead quality improvement activities/initiatives to improve safety, quality of care and clinical outcomes for patients with mental health problems in physical care health settings.</p> <p>Work with stakeholders across organisations with regards to quality improvement and disseminate findings and implement relevant changes.</p>
7	<p>Lead on the provision of psychiatric assessment and treatment of those who are identified as being vulnerable within Liaison Psychiatry.</p> <p>Demonstrate advocacy, leadership and collaborative working around vulnerability and safeguarding in patients, their families and their wider community.</p>	7a) Safeguarding	<p>Demonstrate knowledge of the individual and systemic factors contributing to the vulnerabilities and safeguarding concerns in people of all ages in physical healthcare settings.</p> <p>Understand how physical health comorbidity contributes to the vulnerabilities and safeguarding concerns in people with mental disorders.</p> <p>Demonstrate advocacy, leadership and collaborative working around vulnerability and use of safeguarding procedures in patients in physical health care settings.</p> <p>Demonstrate the ability to include the views and voice of vulnerable patients when working within safeguarding processes, taking into account capacity.</p> <p>Advise others on the use of mental health and capacity legislation in people in physical health care settings.</p> <p>Understand the impact of victimisation and trauma in vulnerable groups.</p>

8	Promote and lead on the provision of effective education and training in clinical, academic and relevant multi-disciplinary settings.	8a) Education & Training	<p>Demonstrate knowledge of principles and methods of lifelong learning, education, teaching and training, and apply these principles physical healthcare settings.</p> <p>Understand your own training needs and pursue your own continuing professional development.</p>
	Demonstrate effective supervision and mentoring skills as essential aspects of education to promote safe and effective learning environments.	8b) Supervision	<p>Provide safe and effective clinical supervision and mentoring in emergency and non-emergency situations in physical healthcare settings.</p> <p>Adapt teaching and training to the needs of particular learners in physical healthcare settings.</p>
9	Apply an up-to-date advanced knowledge of research methodology, critical appraisal and best practice guidance to clinical practice, following ethical and good governance principles.	9a) Undertaking research and critical appraisal	<p>Critically evaluate data papers, reviews, and meta-analyses; and implement findings in daily clinical practice.</p> <p>Translate research into local clinical practice relevant to liaison psychiatry settings and disseminate critical appraisal findings to wider communities.</p> <p>Demonstrate awareness and knowledge of ethical frameworks when carrying out or appraising research.</p> <p>Understand the differences between research, audit, and quality improvement; and how these approaches can complement each other.</p> <p>Demonstrate working knowledge of appropriate statistical methods.</p> <p>Understands the principles of using Research Study Protocols, and if possible gain first-hand practical experience in helping to conduct an ethically-approved research study.</p> <p>Understand the role of and be able to use objective evidenced based clinical assessment instruments.</p>