

Health psychologist

Health psychology uses knowledge of psychology and health to promote general well-being. They also understand the impact on physical illness.

Working life

Health psychologists are specially trained to help people deal with the psychological and emotional aspects of health and illness as well as supporting people who are chronically ill.

They 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.

You'll be part of a rapidly evolving profession that uses the practice and application of psychology to study behaviour relevant to health, illness and healthcare.



Working directly with individuals or small groups, your work will be far-reaching and may involve:

Your focus is on public health problems and how people respond to illness.

- identifying behaviours that may damage a person's health eg smoking, drug abuse, poor diet and how psychological theories and interventions can support prevention and health related behaviour change
- encouraging behaviours such as exercise, a healthy diet, oral hygiene, health checks/self-examination and attending preventative medical screenings
- investigating cognitive behaviour to mediate and determine health and illness behaviours. A range of models and frameworks are used, not only to explain and predict behaviour, but also for developing interventions eg changing health beliefs, increasing internal control or self belief?
- investigating the nature and effects of communication between health professionals and patients including interventions to improve communication
- looking at the psychological impact of illness on individuals, families and carers

You'll also use psychological interventions to help self-management of illness and coping with pain or illness. You may also provide information and advice to a range of organisations involved in public health such as the NHS and local authorities.

Who will I work with?

Health psychologists work with individuals (including children, adults and older adults) or groups or work indirectly through the development of remote approaches such as media or online interventions.

They may work as part of multi-professional teams including doctors [1], nurses [2] and allied health professionals [3].

Where will I work?

Health psychologists work across a range of health care and other providers. Settings can vary from large scale public health programmes to individual or small group consultations.

Health psychologists work in a number of settings, including

- hospitals
- community settings
- private healthcare providers
- academic organisations?

Many health psychologists also work in academia, teaching and researching in their area of expertise.

Want to learn more??

- Find information on the entry requirements for health psychology. [4]
- Find information on training and development in health psychology. [5]

- Pay and conditions

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Most jobs in the NHS are covered by the Agenda for Change (AfC) pay scales [6]. This pay system covers all staff except doctors, dentists and the most senior managers.

After completing their training, health psychologists will be paid at band 7. Psychologists in the NHS will usually work standard hours of 37.5 per week. Terms and conditions can vary for employers outside of the NHS.

- Where the role can lead

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Once you have qualified as a psychologist, there are a wide range of opportunities. You could apply for more senior positions eg head of a psychology service or consultant psychologist. As psychology relies heavily on research, you could contribute to the development of the profession through research work and teaching. You could apply for a trainee high intensity therapist position [7], enabling you to work under the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies initiative (IAPT).

More information on training and development in health psychology. [8]

- Job market and vacancies

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In January 2018, there were 22,960 practitioner psychologists registered with the Health and Care Professions Council [9].

There are over nearly 1,6000 health psychologists in the UK.

Most NHS organisations advertise their job and apprenticeship vacancies on NHS Jobs [10], including those who run NHS services. Some advertise on their own websites. You can find a list of NHS organisations at NHS Choices [11].

If you're applying for a role either directly in the NHS or in an organisation that provides NHS services, you'll be asked to show how you think the values of the NHS Constitution apply in your everyday work. The same will be true if you are applying for a university course funded by the NHS.

Find out more about NHS values. [12]

- Further information

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- British Psychological Society [13]
- Health and Care Professions Council [14]

Other roles that may interest you

- Counsellor [15]
- High intensity therapist [16]
- Clinical psychologist [17]
- Psychological wellbeing practitioner [18]

Source URL: <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/psychological-therapies/roles/health-psychologist>

Links

[1] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-Roles/doctors>

[2] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/nursing>

[3] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/allied-health-professionals>

[4] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/psychological-therapies/roles/health-psychologist/entry-requirements-and-training-health-psychologist>

[5] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/psychological-therapies/roles/health-psychologist/training-and-development-health-psychologist>

[6] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/about/careers-nhs/nhs-pay-and-benefits/agenda-change-pay-rates>

[7] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/psychological-therapies/high-intensity-therapist>

[8] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/psychological-therapies/health-psychologist/training-and-development-health>

[9] <http://www.hcpc-uk.org>

[10] <https://www.jobs.nhs.uk/>

[11] <http://www.nhs.uk/service-search>

[12] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/about/working-health/nhs-constitution>

[13] <http://www.bps.org.uk/careers-in-psychology>

[14] <http://www.hcpc-uk.org/>

[15] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/psychological-therapies/roles/counsellor>

[16] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/psychological-therapies/roles/high-intensity-therapist>

[17] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/psychological-therapies/roles/clinical-psychologist>

[18] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/psychological-therapies/roles/psychological-wellbeing-practitioner>