Medical psychotherapy

Medical psychotherapists are trained psychiatrists who specialise in psychotherapy, the use of psychological or talking treatments.

You'll assess complex psychiatric cases and decide the most appropriate treatment or advise on the management of a patient.

Life as a medical psychotherapist

Your goal is to give a patient a better understanding of their difficulties and worries, their abilities and motivations. You'll help them explore difficult experiences and painful emotions and reflect upon harmful patterns of behaviour.

You'll see patients with a wide range of mental health conditions including:

- anxiety and depression disorders
- health anxiety and eating disorders
- personality disorders
- post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- psychotic disorders

Patients may be experiencing more than one psychological disorder or other difficulties such as anger, low self-esteem and self-harm.

Medical psychotherapists use their expertise to give psychological and relationship-oriented elements to psychiatric care. This could be recognising the impact of mental illness on a patient’s life or the role a patient’s carers and relatives play in their treatment.

There are many different forms of psychotherapy and as a medical psychotherapist working in the NHS, you’re likely to specialise in one type while having a working knowledge of all main forms.

The main types of therapies are:

- **psychoanalytic/psychodynamic psychotherapy** – the relationship between the psychotherapist and the patient is used to explore past and present ways of relating to others and to enable change. Early family and other important relationships are often explored.
- **cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT)** – helps patients to identify unhelpful thought patterns and behaviours which may have contributed to symptoms such as depression...
and encourages more helpful ways of thinking and reacting to situations. The emphasis
is on the present rather than the past, homework between sessions and developing new
skills to get well and stay well.

- **cognitive analytic therapy (CAT)** – looks at the way a person thinks, feels and acts
  and also explores past and present in examining the events and relationships that
  underpin these experiences. The relationship between the client and therapist is also
  used to help achieve recognition and change.
- **systemic therapy** – looks at the relationships between individuals as part of a unit and
  how systems work together. Groups and family therapy are examples of this approach.
- **trauma-focused therapy** – such as eye movement desensitising and reprocessing
  therapy (EMDR), focuses on the bodily felt-sense and aims to help the patient digest or
  process traumatic experiences which may have caused a variety of symptoms including
  PTSD.

Medical psychotherapists have an extremely varied working life. You’ll work in general
hospitals and outpatients, contribute to the community mental health team (CMHT) and could
run units dealing with specific disorders such as eating disorders, personality disorders and
trauma.

**How much can I earn?**

You’ll first earn a salary when you start your foundation training [1] after medical school. The
basic salary ranges from £32,398 to £37,303. Once you start your specialty training in the
NHS, you can expect to earn a salary of at least £43,923, which can increase to between
£93,666 and £126,281 as a consultant.

**How about the benefits?**

- make a difference
- flexible and part-time working
- high income early in your career
- work anywhere in the world
- excellent pension scheme
- good holiday entitlement
- NHS discounts in shops and restaurants

**Must-have skills**

- excellent communication skills to manage a wide range of relationships with colleagues,
  and patients and their families
- emotional resilience, a calm temperament and the ability to work well under pressure
- teamwork and the capacity to lead multidisciplinary teams
- problem-solving and diagnostic skills
- outstanding?organisational?ability and effective decision-making skills?
- first-class time and resource management for the benefit of patients

In addition, medical psychotherapists need to demonstrate:

- empathy and compassion and the ability to treat others with understanding and respect
• patience – progress can sometimes be slow
• self-understanding and the willingness to learn by applying some of the principles of
  their therapeutic approach to their own lives

Entry requirements

Your first step is medical school. Typically, you’ll need excellent GCSEs and three A or A*
  passes at A level including chemistry for a five-year undergraduate degree in medicine. Many
  medical schools also ask for biology and others may require maths or physics.

If you already have a degree, you could study for a four-year postgraduate degree in medicine.

You’ll need to pass an interview and admissions test. You’ll be asked to show how you
demonstrate the NHS values such as compassion and respect.

Some medical schools look to recruit a mix of students from different backgrounds and
geographical areas, so your educational and economic background and family circumstances
could be considered as part of your application.

How to become a medical psychotherapist

After medical school, you’ll join the paid two-year foundation programme where you’ll work
in six placements in different settings.

After your foundation programme, you can apply for paid specialty training to become a
medical psychotherapist, which will take a minimum of six years.

You may be able to train part time, for example for health reasons or if you have family or
caring responsibilities.

What are my chances of starting a career in a medical psychotherapy?

In 2021, there were 32 consultants in medical psychotherapy working in the NHS in England.
In 2020, there were 14 applications for four training places.

Where a career as a medical psychotherapist can take you

You could:

• specialise or conduct research
• teach medical students or postgraduate students in training?
• get involved in research at universities, the NHS or private sector

•
Consultant Psychiatrist in Medical Psychotherapy

Colchester, CO1 1ST

Salary: £93666.00 to £126281.00
Type: Permanent
Employer: Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust
Apply now on NHS Jobs for Consultant Psychiatrist in Medical Psychotherapy job (opens in a new window) [4]

Consultant Psychiatrist - Psychotherapy

Northampton, NN1 5DG

Salary: £120000.00 to £150000.00
Type: Permanent
Employer: St Andrew’s Healthcare
Apply now on NHS Jobs for Consultant Psychiatrist - Psychotherapy job (opens in a new window) [5]

Medical Examiner

Southampton, SO16 6YD

Salary: £93666.00 to £126281.00
Type: Permanent
Medical Director

Old Brampton, S42 7JD

Salary: £93666.00 to £126281.00
Type: Permanent

Medical Administrator

London, E2 0FA

Salary: £12.00
Type: Permanent

Medical Engineer

Stoke on Trent, ST4 6QG

Salary: £25147.00 to £34581.00
Type: Permanent

Medical Administrator

Hereford, HR4 9JP

Salary: £12.86
Type: Permanent
The Wye Clinic
Apply now on NHS Jobs for Medical Administrator job (opens in a new window)

Medical Summariser

London, E2 0FA

Salary: £12.00 to £14.00
Type: Permanent
Employer: Suttons Wharf Health Centre
Apply now on NHS Jobs for Medical Summariser job (opens in a new window)

Medical Examiner

Chesterfield, S44 5BL

Salary: £93666.00 to £126281.00
Type: Permanent
Employer: Chesterfield Royal Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
Apply now on NHS Jobs for Medical Examiner job (opens in a new window)

Medical Photographer

Upton, Wirral, CH49 5PE

Salary: £28407.00 to £34581.00
Type: Fixed-Term
Employer: Wirral University Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust
Apply now on NHS Jobs for Medical Photographer job (opens in a new window)

Further information

These organisations have further information about being a doctor in medical psychotherapy, particularly as your career progresses. Take a look.

Association for Cognitive Analytic Therapy
British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Therapies [15]

British Psychoanalytic Council [16]

Royal College of Psychiatrists [17]

UK Council for Psychotherapy [18]

Other roles that may interest you

- General practitioner [19]
- Neurologist [20]
- Forensic psychiatry [21]
- Clinical bioinformatics health informatics [22]

Source URL: https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/doctors/roles-doctors/psychiatry/medical-psychotherapy

Links