Cancer Care Psychology Service
Information for patients, carers and their families

Why is this service important?
Heightened psychological distress after the diagnosis of cancer is common, with up to 35 per cent of people affected by cancer reporting ongoing distress

As a result, psychological distress is recognised internationally as the ‘sixth vital sign’ to be monitored as part of standard oncology care. There is a substantive body of evidence supporting psychological therapies as a strategy to reduce distress associated with cancer.

Who is eligible and what type of support does this service provide?
All Cancer Care Service patients at any stage of their cancer journey are eligible to utilise the psychology service. Family members and carers are encouraged to speak to their G.P. to discuss a referral to community psychology services for further support.

The psychological service primarily provides individual outpatient clinic appointments. Couple/two-person appointments are available as required and indicated. Inpatient sessions are also available, however patients should note that privacy cannot be guaranteed in the ward environment. Home visits are not available.

The psychological service may also provide group education sessions in collaboration with other Cancer Care Service nursing and allied health staff, as well as community agencies, such as Cancer Council Queensland.

Who provides the psychological service?
Your psychologist will inform you about which one of the following three types of psychologists you will be seeing within the Cancer Care Service:

- Clinical and/or health psychologists—hold general registration and are endorsed by the Psychology Board of Australia following receiving specialist training in clinical and/or health psychology.
- Psychologists—hold general registration with the Psychology Board of Australia.
- Provisional psychologists—hold provisional registration with the Psychology Board of Australia. Provisional psychologists are currently completing post-graduate Clinical Psychology training and receive supervision from the Cancer Care Service Clinical Psychologists.

Privacy and confidentiality
As part of providing a psychological service to you within the Cancer Care Service, the psychologists working within the Cancer Care Service need to collect and record personal information from you that is relevant to your situation.

This information can include: current stressors, medical and mental health history, family and developmental history, and other relevant information.
How is client information collected?

In addition to collecting information directly from you, there are a number of other ways in which the psychologist may acquire information. This includes via hard and softcopy assessment forms, correspondence and medical reports, and from other Cancer Care Service employees (e.g. nursing staff). This information is retained in your medical chart in order to enable the psychologists to provide a relevant and informed psychological service to you.

Is client information disclosed to others?

The Cancer Care Services psychologists work in a multidisciplinary team, so there may be instances when the psychologists will need to disclose personal information to other disciplines and services who also work with the Cancer Care Service. These instances may include multidisciplinary team meetings and letters to your G.P. The psychologists will ensure that only relevant information is shared for the purpose of providing you with the best care throughout your cancer journey.

There may be instances when the Cancer Care Service psychologists are required by law to disclose your personal information. These instances include:

1. When it is subpoenaed by a court; or
2. Failure to disclose the information would, in the reasonable belief of the Cancer Care Service psychologists, place a client or another person at serious risk to life, health or safety; or
3. Disclosure is otherwise required by law.

What will be expected of me as a patient?

Psychological therapy is a collaborative approach. Your first appointment will be an opportunity for your psychologist to get to know you and your current situation by completing a comprehensive assessment. This session usually takes between 60 to 90 minutes. Throughout the session you have the right to ask questions at any time.

Following the comprehensive assessment your psychologist will request your assistance in determining your treatment goals. This may occur at the conclusion of the first appointment, at the beginning of the second appointment, or you may be asked to consider your treatment goals between appointments.

Once these goals are agreed upon your psychologist will explain to you the treatment options (i.e. therapies) and the advantages and disadvantages of each.

An agreement between you and the psychologist of the treatment approach will occur before treatment is commenced.

Therapy appointments are generally 50 to 60 minutes in length and because of this you may be provided with weekly tasks to complete outside of the therapeutic setting to help further your progress and recovery. Appointments may occur at a weekly or fortnightly basis initially, extending to a monthly or bi-monthly basis once both parties agree beneficial progress is occurring or to suit circumstantial changes.

Conclusion of treatment

The number of appointments required to reach the treatment goals varies between individuals. Your psychologist in conjunction with you will continually review your progress throughout your treatment. If your treatment goals have been reached and sustained for an agreed upon time, your psychologist might suggest that treatment be concluded.

If your treatment goals are not being reached, your psychologist may suggest a number of alternatives. These include a change in the treatment approach, a referral for a second opinion or a transfer to an alternate psychologist.

You may terminate your sessions at any time, but it is recommended you discuss this decision with your psychologist if possible.

Will there be a cost?

There is no cost for psychology services within the Cancer Care Service.

Cancellation of appointments

If you need to cancel or postpone your appointment with your psychologist, please contact the Cancer Care Service at least one day prior to your appointment. If you are able to contact the Cancer Care Service earlier, this will assist in offering the appointment time to another patient; and it will be greatly appreciated by the service and that patient.

After reading this information sheet, please discuss any concerns or questions that you have with your treating psychologist at your first appointment.