

Worcestershire CFS/ME Service

After a long time with very few staff in the CFS/ ME service, I'm very pleased to say we now have a full team... and it seems a good time to introduce ourselves and what we offer as a service!

I'm Marina Townend, Specialist Occupational Therapist and Team lead. Dr Helen Ayres (Clinical Psychologist) and Sara Young (Specialist OT) remain with the team, and we have been joined by Alice Brixey (Assistant Psychologist), Kirsti Barnes (Administrator) and Julie Poulsen (Honorary Assistant Psychologist). We are all part-time and work with people who have a confirmed diagnosis of CFS/ ME across the whole of Worcestershire. Referrals are made by Consultant Physicians and GPs.

When people are first referred into the service, they (and a friend or family member) are invited to book onto an Information session. These are held on the first Tuesday of the month and alternate between the north and south of the county. In this session, we talk about CFS/ ME and give a brief overview of various evidence-based strategies that people find helpful in managing the condition. It is also a chance to meet some of the team and hear more about what the service provides. People are then given the chance to opt-in or out of receiving more input.

Those who request more support will be offered an individual meeting with an OT, when they will have the opportunity to talk more about how the condition affects them and agree a treatment plan. At the moment, this generally involves attendance at one of our Lifestyle Management Groups but individual sessions with an OT or Psychologist may be offered if the group is not appropriate or if further support is required.

The **Lifestyle Management group** runs over 8 weeks and is held at various venues in the county, the aim being to ensure no one has to travel too far to receive input. In the groups, we look at the management strategies that were introduced in the Information session in much more detail and participants are encouraged to look at applying these specifically to their own lives.

Topics include: sleep, stress management, graded exercise therapy, thoughts and feelings, activity management, communication and relapse management. We get positive feedback about these groups and people seem to really appreciate the chance to share with others who have the same condition.

Following the group, everyone has the opportunity to review their progress with a member of the team. This is usually several months later, when they have been able to try out and implement the strategies taught. Together, we celebrate any achievements and problem-solve around any difficulties that people may have experienced.

If there are psychological blocks to recovery/ management, people may be offered individual sessions with a Psychologist and/or a Psychology group. The latter runs over 6 weeks and again, a review appointment is offered at the end of this.

At any stage in the care pathway people may opt to be discharged, with the understanding that they can be re-referred back at any time in the future. We know that some people get anxious about discharge, and this is very understandable as CFS/ ME is a chronic condition that does not generally go away. We are only commissioned to undertake specific episodes of care and have to discharge people at the end of this, but in response to patients' feedback we offer a monthly **Recovery and Management (RaM) group**, held at Worcester University.

The group is open to anyone who has completed the Lifestyle Management group and is keen to continue their improvement and management of the condition. Some people come along if they are experiencing a relapse, others because they value the on-going support and information. We have a new format this year, with some different topics and speakers, and now ask that people book onto specific sessions of interest.

For those of you who have used the CFS/ ME service, we would welcome any feedback about your experience, particularly if it has been in the past couple of years.

We will ensure that this is taken to the service review that is going to be undertaken in the near future, and hope that as many views as possible can be represented. Please email any comments and suggestions to WHCNHS.chronicfatigue@nhs.net.

We do recognise that CFS/ME can have a huge impact on people's lives (that of the person experiencing the condition *and* those around them), and that there are very limited resources to support them. I am keen to work more closely with the local ME support groups in order to maximise our effectiveness and look forward to meeting many of you over the coming months.

Contact details: Website: www.hacw.nhs.uk/our-services/chronic-fatigue-syndrome/
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