



Implementing the NHS Long Term Plan:

Maximising the Impact of the Psychological Professions




The Psychological Professions Network

A collaboration of regional networks sponsored by Health Education England to give voice to all psychological professions in workforce planning and to promote excellence in practice

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About the Psychological Professions Network

The Psychological Professions Network exists to maximise the benefits to the public of the psychological professions across NHS funded healthcare. It consists of workforce networks across England that join up twelve psychological professions: practitioner psychologists (clinical, counselling, forensic and health), cognitive behavioural therapists, counsellors, adult psychotherapists, child psychotherapists, systemic family therapists, psychological wellbeing practitioners, children's wellbeing practitioners and education mental health practitioners. The Psychological Professions Network provides a joined-up voice for the psychological professions in policy-making and builds bridges between psychological professionals, the public and policy-makers.

1. Introduction

The proposals set out in the NHS Long Term Plan plot an ambitious path over the next decade to transform the nation's physical and mental health. Coupled with the commitment to grow mental health spending as a proportion of the overall spending on the NHS, these proposals represent vital progress towards parity of esteem for mental health in England. Yet, with services stretched and the NHS facing significant workforce challenges, translating this Plan into real improvements for service users, carers and families will not be easy. Delivering the NHS Long Term Plan will require strong leadership at local, regional and national levels, a willingness to adopt new ways of working and, above all, ensuring the right workforce is in place.

There are currently over 20,000 psychological professionals working for NHS funded services in England, providing approximately 12 per cent of the registered clinical staff of specialist NHS mental health Trusts and 1.7 per cent of the NHS workforce. The psychological professions comprise twelve distinct occupations working in NHS funded healthcare: practitioner psychologists (clinical, counselling, forensic and health), cognitive behavioural therapists, counsellors, adult psychotherapists, child psychotherapists, systemic family therapists, psychological wellbeing practitioners and two emerging new roles: children's wellbeing practitioners and education mental health practitioners.

The psychological professions have already seen rapid expansion in recent years, in line with the ambitions of the Five Year Forward View for Mental Health and Stepping Forward to 2020/21: A Mental Health Workforce Plan for England. Along with the expansion plans set out in the NHS Long Term Plan and the Long Term Plan Implementation Framework, the psychological professions workforce will need to expand by more than 50 per cent over the next decade.

These new roles will not be confined to one area of practice, but will be spread across the whole health and care system, including perinatal mental health, children and young people's mental health, adult common mental health problems, adult severe mental health problems, major health conditions, autism and learning disability, older people, as well as those working with communities and supporting the NHS workforce.

Many of the new posts will operate in non-traditional settings, such as schools, colleges or primary care settings. Opening up new areas to psychological practice presents exciting new opportunities to move away from a dualistic model of healthcare and towards a more integrated and psychologically-informed approach that puts service users rather than their conditions at the heart of the health and care system.

This paper describes the significant contribution the psychological professions will make, alongside nursing, medical, allied health professions, pharmacy and healthcare science colleagues, towards delivering on the key ambitions of the NHS Long Term Plan and reshaping healthcare provision over the next decade.

2. Delivering the key ambitions of the NHS Long Term Plan

The Psychological Professions Network welcomes the ambitious plans for transforming physical and mental health care provision outlined in the NHS Long Term Plan. The twelve psychological professions will play an integral role in helping to deliver a number of these ambitions.



Perinatal care

Increasing the period during which new mothers will be able to access specialist perinatal mental healthcare to two years after birth and extending the offer of mental healthcare to women and their partners have potential not only to reduce the incidence and severity of perinatal mental health problems, but also to improve parents' ability to bond with and care for their babies.

This will have long-lasting impacts on children's physical, social, emotional and cognitive outcomes. The psychological professions will play a central role in this expansion of perinatal mental health care by:

- Delivering evidence-based psychological therapies within specialist perinatal mental health services to 24,000 new mothers with moderate to severe perinatal mental health difficulties per year by 2023/24, in addition to the extra 30,000 women getting specialist help by 2020/21;
- Delivering evidence-based psychological assessments, formulations and interventions, as well as psychological support in maternity settings and new maternity outreach clinics;
- Providing leadership in shaping the expansion of services and supporting the integration of maternity, reproductive health and psychological therapeutic support for women experiencing mental health difficulties;
- Offering assessments and psychological support and therapy to the 5 to 10 per cent of fathers and partners who experience mental health difficulties during the perinatal period.



Children and young people

Children and Young People's mental health services have experienced historic underinvestment. The prioritisation of children and young people's mental health in the NHS Long Term Plan and increased investment in this area are welcome. The vision of delivering support beyond NHS boundaries, reaching out into schools, colleges and universities, has real potential to deliver a more preventative approach and improve early detection and intervention.

It will enable 345,000 more children and young people to access mental health support. The psychological professions will support this expansion in provision by:

- Providing specialist knowledge, training, supervision and consultation to the new school and college based Mental Health Support Teams;
- Helping to shape the new Mental Health Support Teams and ensure seamless integration with existing children and young people's mental health services and the Children and Young Peoples' IAPT programme;
- Delivering evidence-based psychological assessments, formulation and interventions to 6,000 highly vulnerable children with complex trauma, as well as to many of the 345,000 extra children and young people accessing support;
- Supporting the establishment, integration, sustainability and professional leadership of the emerging new roles of Children's Wellbeing Practitioner and Education Mental Health Practitioner.



Adult mental health: common mental health problems

The Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) programme has delivered a dramatic improvement in access to NICE-approved psychological therapies for adults with anxiety and depression since 2008, with one million patients accessing these services each year. The proposals in the NHS Long Term Plan aim to increase this to 1.9 million adults and older adults with anxiety and depression each year by 2023/24. This means an extra 380,000 people each year, on top of the commitments made in the Five Year Forward View for Mental Health. Much of this expansion will focus on providing services for people with anxiety and depression linked to long term physical health conditions such as cardiovascular disease or diabetes.

The psychological professions will continue to lead and deliver this expansion in provision. Since 2008 approximately 7,500 new posts have been created, primarily for cognitive behavioural therapists and psychological wellbeing practitioners, but also for counsellors and practitioner psychologists. Significant further workforce growth will be required in the IAPT workforce – delivering the full range of NICE-approved therapies for anxiety and depression. The psychological professions will support this expansion by:

- Growing the workforce of cognitive behavioural therapists, psychological wellbeing practitioners, counsellors and other psychological professionals with training in specific NICE-guided therapies for depression and anxiety by an additional 2,860 new practitioners by 2023/24;
- Providing strong professional and clinical leadership and governance within these expanding services;
- Maintaining a strong network of appropriately trained clinical supervisors;
- Delivering the training and research that underpins services;
- Working to maximise the effectiveness of the services by learning from patient outcome reporting.



Adult mental health: community, acute and crisis care

The NHS Long Term Plan sets out proposals to improve community mental health support to 370,000 people with Severe Mental Illness (SMI) via new and integrated models of primary and community care, as well as a significant expansion of support for people experiencing a mental health crisis. The psychological professions will be at the forefront of this transformation by:

- Helping to shape the new integrated community services and ensuring they take a psychologically-informed approach to people experiencing severe mental health problems;
- Working within the new integrated multi-disciplinary community teams to deliver NICE-recommended psychological therapies for people with psychosis, bipolar disorder and personality disorders, and other complex mental health problems;
- Supporting and empowering people with severe mental health illness to be fully involved in making positive choices about their own health and lives;
- Supporting and helping to shape mental health liaison services providing mental health care to people with urgent needs arriving in A&E;
- Providing specialist knowledge, training, supervision and consultation to the paramedics, NHS 111 and other staff providing 24/7 support to people experiencing a mental health crisis.



Learning disabilities and autism

The NHS Long Term Plan pledges to do more to ensure that all people with a learning disability, autism, or both can live happier, healthier, longer lives. This includes cutting waiting times for diagnostic assessments, improving community provision, particularly for those with the most complex needs and building better staff awareness and understanding. Psychological professions will support these developments by:

- Delivering evidence-based psychological assessments, formulation and interventions to children, young people and adults with learning disabilities and/or autism;
- Providing expertise in relation to trauma and other neurological factors impacting on autism within multi-disciplinary teams;
- Working with colleagues to ensure more people with learning disabilities and/or autism can access personalised care in the community;
- Supporting mainstream services to make all reasonable adjustments required by people with learning disabilities and/or autism to allow better access to these services.



Dementia care and ageing well

The NHS Long Term Plan makes a commitment to improve support for people with dementia. Ways in which the psychological professions are supporting people to live well with dementia include:

- Delivering pre-diagnostic counselling to help individuals make an informed choice about whether to undergo diagnostic assessment;
- Undertaking cognitive and neuropsychological assessments;
- Supporting people with dementia to adjust and improve daily functioning and quality of life;
- Providing education, counselling and psychological support to families and carers;
- Delivering evidence-based psychological treatment where required, for example to reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression;
- Supporting individuals in the later stages of dementia and their carers where behaviour can become challenging.



Mental health inpatient care

Working alongside nursing, medical, allied health professionals, pharmacy and healthcare science colleagues, the psychological professions will contribute to the NHS Long Term Plan commitment to reduce the length of stays in units with a long length of stay to the national average of 32 days, for example by:

- Providing wider access to psychological interventions and psychologically-informed care during inpatient admission;
- Taking up roles as responsible clinicians to support effective and safe multi-disciplinary management of care under the Mental Health Act;
- Supporting other professions to deliver trauma informed care to reduce the potentially traumatising/re-traumatising aspects of in-patient care;
- Contributing to multi-professional team working to support recovery and relapse prevention approaches as part of a personalised approach to case management.



Digital innovations

While digitally-enabled self-care models have been available within the NHS for some time, new opportunities are opening up to expand how psychological therapies are delivered using technology, as well as to improve the process of care delivery. The Topol Review outlines the ambition for the NHS workforce to become digitally-enabled over the next decade and identifies key technologies that are poised to impact mental healthcare over the next 20 years (Foley and Woollard, 2019). The psychological professions will support this innovative area in a number of ways including:

- Establishing the evidence base for new models of treatment delivery including psychological therapies;
- Piloting new approaches and innovative technologies, such as virtual and augmented reality;
- Ensuring that any investment delivers effective, high-quality treatment and enhances rather than diminishes effectiveness;
- Championing innovative approaches to health care data collection in order to optimise the effective use of a clinical outcomes based approaches to care;
- Advising the wider NHS on the psychological impact of digital ways of delivering care on patients and workforce and integrating evidence from the behavioural sciences to improve effectiveness of treatments and training approaches.

3. The opportunity: maximising the potential of the psychological professions

Psychological professionals can contribute to transforming the health and care landscape as practitioners of evidence-based healthcare but also as clinical leaders, researchers and innovators.

3.1 Informing systems change

The NHS Long Term Plan has set a clear direction for more integrated services, with Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) and the 'duty to collaborate' on providers and commissioners offering key mechanisms for achieving this. Delivering more joined-up services will require a new generation of professionally diverse leaders, with the capacity to manage increasingly complex strategic and operational problems.

As NHS Improvement (2019) acknowledges, professions like practitioner psychologists have significant leadership contributions to make in driving system-wide change. They are experienced in working across traditional boundaries, supporting change management and in developing innovative ways to work with populations who may find services hard to reach. This experience will become all the more important as the NHS seeks to reach into new communities and non-NHS settings, such as schools and colleges, and as new roles emerge.

3.2 Developing new ways of working

The psychological professions are already contributing solutions to the wider workforce shortages in the NHS, which are particularly problematic in mental health services. They are identifying new opportunities for partnership working, developing new roles, such as Children's Wellbeing Practitioners, and extending practice within existing roles.

Psychological professionals are well placed to take up roles that may have traditionally been held by psychiatrists, such as responsible clinician roles, and the ready supply of applicants for the psychological professions offers new opportunities to develop additional capacity that may offset supply shortages of traditional roles like mental health nurses. The training, governance, supervision and integration of these new roles with the wider workforce will be crucial to their success and safety.

3.3 Promoting population health and wellbeing

While the focus of the psychological professions has traditionally been on delivering psychological interventions rather than preventing ill health, there are now many examples of this workforce turning its focus to improving psychological wellbeing and resilience in communities. Prevention and early intervention are essential to reducing the numbers of people developing mental health conditions.

The prominence given to children's and perinatal mental health in the NHS Long Term Plan marks an important shift in emphasis towards intervening at an earlier stage and the psychological professions will be at the forefront of delivering on these commitments. There is scope to do more. By offering more proactive screening in communities, like that carried out by the Manchester Resilience Hub, developing more trauma-informed care, building understanding of the long term impact of adverse childhood experiences, and providing more attachment-based psychological support in early years, the psychological professions could make a significant contribution towards preventing mental ill-health and building wellbeing and resilience.

CASE STUDY: Manchester Manchester Resilience Hub

The Resilience Hub was established in response to the Manchester Arena Attack in 2017 to coordinate care and support for thousands of children, young people and adults whose mental health and/or emotional wellbeing was affected.

In addition to offering trauma-focused psychological therapies and group and family events, the Hub is running a proactive screening programme to ensure early detection of those who may need support. The Resilience Hub supports more than 3,300 individuals.

3.4 Tackling inequalities

The NHS Long Term Plan acknowledges that certain groups, such as black and minority ethnic groups (BAME), homeless people, survivors of violence, the LGBT+ community and people living with disabilities experience inequalities in accessing health and care support. The Plan's ambition to ensure that the parts of England most affected by rough sleeping will have better access to specialist homelessness mental health support is particularly welcome.

More can be done, particularly in targeting deprived communities, where depression, stress and anxiety are particularly prevalent, and addressing the barriers that prevent particular communities from accessing services. The psychological professions have much to contribute here, drawing on evidence regarding attachment, mistrust and help seeking behaviour, as well as on the experience of peer supporters and experts by experience.

3.5 NHS staff wellbeing

Almost 40 per cent of NHS staff who responded to the 2018 Staff Survey (NHS England, 2019) reported feeling unwell as a result of work related stress over the last 12 months – the highest proportion for five years. The NHS Long Term Plan has set the challenge of establishing a new deal for staff, where all staff feel supported and respected for the valuable work they do and supporting NHS staff wellbeing is a prominent feature of the 2019/20 Health Education England Mandate.

The NHS Staff and Learners' Mental Wellbeing Commission (Health Education England, 2019) offers important recommendations towards meeting this challenge. The Commission's recommendation that all NHS staff should have self-referral access to a practitioner psychological treatment service in particular is a welcome acknowledgement of the need to secure the health and wellbeing of NHS staff. However, it will put additional pressures on existing services and will require a further expansion of the psychological professions.

Psychological professionals are already working in many areas to design, deliver and evaluate programmes that contribute to staff wellbeing, including stress-management courses and mindfulness interventions. Other psychological professionals are advising organisations on the best way to support psychological wellbeing in high demand environments. This work can provide a much needed evidence-base for how to improve the emotional and psychological wellbeing of NHS staff.

CASE STUDY: Birmingham Birmingham Healthy Minds

Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust has developed a psychoeducational group aimed at increasing engagement in services by South Asian women – a population for whom depression and anxiety is prevalent and treatment is often not accessed.

Facilitated by two Psychological Wellbeing Practitioners who speak Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi or Bengali, the group offers evidence-based interventions adapted and delivered in a way that respects cultural diversity. The project has seen good clinical outcomes for participants and improved engagement with this client group.

CASE STUDY: Kent, Surrey and Sussex A randomised controlled trial of staff wellbeing interventions for mental health staff

During 2017-2018, 250 staff of mental health services were offered the opportunity to take part in a trial of Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy courses or a CBT-based staff wellbeing workshop. Staff could choose which intervention to attend and were randomly assigned to either an immediate course, or a wait-list.

Both interventions were found to be effective in reducing levels of staff stress and increasing wellbeing, compared to the wait-list alternative.

3.6 Person-centred care

It is now widely acknowledged that integrating physical and mental health by embedding talking therapies and psychologically informed practice into physical health care improves patient outcomes and recovery, and optimises coping and functioning. This means extending evidence-based psychological therapies to people with long-term physical health conditions, but also working to develop a more psychologically informed and effective model of healthcare.

Psychological professionals, such as clinical, counselling and health psychologists, are already working across the health and care system helping people manage the psychological and emotional aspects of health and illness like dementia, supporting those who are chronically ill or with medically unexplained symptoms, promoting healthier lifestyles and supporting people to improve their physical and mental health. Embedding the psychological professions in physical health and care services, whether through the new Primary Care Networks and community teams, liaison services or nursing care homes, will support service integration and enable service users to access care that meets both their physical and psychological needs.

Dealing with the current gaps in services, experienced particularly by service users with drug and alcohol problems, those with learning difficulties that do not meet the criteria for specialist services and people with multiple physical and mental health difficulties, will also require reshaping services along more psychologically informed rather than traditional lines.

If services are to be designed around people, rather than conditions, significant changes will be required – not least improvements in information-sharing systems, more pooling of budgets and joint commissioning and increased co-location of services. More cross-boundary training and support will be needed to build a health and social care workforce that is better informed about the indivisibility of physical and mental health.

CASE STUDY: North Cumbria Familiar Faces Project

In North Cumbria the Familiar Faces project sees a multi-disciplinary team, including Psychologists, Physiotherapists and Living Well Coaches, working alongside local GPs to better understand and manage the physical, emotional and social needs of frequent users of local health services.

The team works to help clients to become activated, enjoy better psychological wellbeing, and reduce inappropriate attendances and their exposure to unnecessary investigations and medication.

CASE STUDY: Sussex Flourishing Families Clinic

Following a successful trial, Flourishing Families is the UK's first clinic established to prevent family transmission of anxiety from parent to child. The clinic offers parenting workshops, delivered over two sessions, to parents and families who experience high levels of anxiety.

It aims to equip them with the tools to go on to raise confident children and thereby prevent anxiety being passed down through generations.

4. The challenge

The case studies in this report illustrate just some of the ways in which the psychological professions are already transforming care for service users and communities. For the professions to continue to innovate and provide the high-quality, effective services outlined in the NHS Long Term Plan a number of significant challenges will need to be tackled.

4.1 Expanding the workforce

Meeting the ambitions of the NHS Long Term Plan and making the most of the opportunities the Plan offers to transform care for service users will require expansion of the psychological professions, in tandem with the wider mental health workforce, at a greater pace and scale than ever before. The NHS Mental Health Implementation Plan 2019/20 – 2023/24 suggests around 2,520 more Psychologists and 5,610 additional Psychotherapists and other psychological professionals will be required across the key programme areas. This expansion comes in addition to the estimated 6,425 new full-time posts (Psychological Professions Network Alliance, 2018) needed to deliver the requirements of the Five Year Forward View for Mental Health and Stepping Forward to 2020/21.

Expanding the workforce does not necessarily mean 'more of the same'. The psychological professions are already supporting creative and flexible approaches to expanding the workforce, exploring how best to utilise the ready supply of people wanting to enter the psychological professions and developing new roles, such as specialist assistant practitioners and children's psychological wellbeing practitioners. However, much work still needs to be done to ensure these roles are fully integrated into the system and to understand the workforce flow between psychological professions.

4.2 Funding of training

Uncertainty about the funding of training for the psychological professions has presented a significant risk to workforce expansion, creating difficulties for services in planning the future supply of their psychological workforce and for universities aiming to provide sustainable courses.

A self-funding model of postgraduate training for currently funded groups would not be successful because of the significant debt trainees will already be carrying from their undergraduate degrees and the high costs of training. Work is now underway to increase certainty through a review of education funding for these groups. These issues have potential to undermine the expansion in the workforce that will be needed to implement the NHS Long Term Plan and must be resolved rapidly.

4.3 Leadership

Across the health and social care commissioning landscape there are gaps in leadership positions for the psychological professions. Unlike every other workforce group in the health and social care sector, there is currently no national Chief Officer role or co-ordinating leadership function for the psychological professions within the national Arms Length Bodies (ALBs). Within regional and system structures leadership presence for the psychological professions is variable, and at a local level there is no requirement for providers, including mental health providers, to have representation of the psychological professions at Board level.

This lack of presence of psychological professions leadership at all levels within the NHS has had a significant adverse impact on policy development, implementation and workforce planning for the psychological professions. If not addressed, it risks compromising the delivery of key aspects of the NHS Long Term Plan.

5. Recommendations

The psychological professions have a significant contribution to make towards delivering the NHS Long Term Plan and supporting the transformation of health and care provision over the next decade. In order to maximise this contribution, the Psychological Professions Network makes the following recommendations:

Strategy

- A National Psychological Professions Strategy should be developed to articulate a strong vision to maximise the impact of the twelve psychological professions working within NHS funded services.

Workforce plan

- A detailed integrated Workforce Plan for the psychological professions should be developed to support the expansion of the workforce and the implementation of the NHS Long Term Plan and the NHS People Plan.

Leadership

- The clinical and professional leadership of the psychological professions at local, regional and national levels should be reviewed and greater presence established.
- A Chief Psychological Professions Officer should be appointed to support the rapid expansion of the psychological professions, drive innovation and service improvement and provide a strong clinical voice and united vision for the psychological professions working in NHS funded services.
- All mental health providers delivering services to NHS patients should implement psychological professions representation at Board level.

Careers and training path

- A more integrated, coherent and efficient career path should be developed for the twelve psychological professions.
- Training providers should be better supported to incorporate service-user and carer voices within training courses for the psychological professions.

6. Conclusion

The NHS Long Term Plan represents vital progress towards a more psychological NHS and towards parity of esteem for mental health. It could be transformative if delivered effectively, with the right workforce and leadership in place. But the potential of the Plan will only become a reality if psychological professions are embedded within the heart of the new systems and structures that are developing.

Working alongside service users, carers and families and the wider multi-disciplinary NHS workforce, the psychological professions are ideally placed to deliver on significant commitments within the NHS Long Term Plan, such as the expansion of IAPT services and specialist perinatal mental health services, and to help shape the system to better meet the psychological, emotional, social and physical health needs of the nation.

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