

Psychology is the scientific study of human thought and behaviour. Many people are interested in psychology, and in fact it is one of the most popular degrees that can be studied at university. But having a degree in psychology is not the same as being a Registered Practitioner Psychologist. A Registered Psychologist is a legally regulated professional who has a postgraduate qualification in the application of psychological science to a particular issue.

There are currently seven types of Practitioner Psychologists:

- Clinical Psychologists
- Counselling Psychologists
- Educational Psychologists
- Forensic Psychologists
- Health Psychologists
- Occupational Psychologists
- Sports & Exercise Psychologists

How do clinical psychologists help people?

Every day clinical psychologists help a wide range of people of all ages with all sorts of problems. Some have particular emotional or mental health problems, such as depression or schizophrenia. Others have difficulties with their thinking (also known as 'cognitive' problems). These can take many forms, such as problems with memory or perception after a head injury, a learning disability or dementia.

There are many more areas of life where a clinical psychologist can help. These could include helping people manage and live with health conditions such as HIV, cancer or chronic pain, assisting people who have difficulties in maintaining relationships, or providing advice about how to care for a child who has been abused.

Sometimes the clinical psychologist will be the one who then provides the help. Examples of this include seeing the person for a number of sessions to provide psychological therapy or giving advice on how to manage memory problems. And sometimes the clinical psychologist will recommend other people who can help, perhaps advising them on the best way forward for the client.

Clinical psychologists are trained by the NHS, just like doctors and nurses, and most work there too.

What training do clinical psychologists have?

Registered clinical psychologists have a degree in psychology plus an additional three to five years of postgraduate experience and university training in applying the science of psychology to clinical problems.

It therefore takes six to eight years to qualify as a Registered clinical psychologist, and the qualification that Registered clinical psychologists now obtain is a doctorate in clinical psychology.

What should I do if I want to see a clinical psychologist?

If you want to see a clinical psychologist within the NHS, you will normally need a referral from your GP. So talk to them if you think that seeing a psychologist will be helpful.

Can I see a clinical psychologist privately?

Yes, it is also possible to see a clinical psychologist privately.

One useful place to find listings of clinical psychologists is the British Psychological Society's List of Chartered Psychologists (available at www.bps.org.uk). This lists all psychologists



Chartered by the Society. However, not all of these people are registered to practise clinically; for example, some might be academics or teachers.

If you want to check whether someone is registered to practise clinically, you need to check with the Health Professions Council (see below).

What is the difference between a clinical psychologist and a psychiatrist?

Clinical psychologists and psychiatrists often work in the same clinics and see people with similar problems, but there is a clear difference between them. Clinical psychologists' key role is to consider what the science of psychology tells them about

how to help with the problem. And psychiatrists' key role is to consider what the science of medicine tells them about how to help with the problem. They are each able to do this because the first stage in training as a clinical psychologist is a degree in psychology, whereas the first stage in training as a psychiatrist is a degree in medicine.

So if you are depressed, for instance, a psychiatrist is best placed to help you think about whether a biological treatment like antidepressant drugs may help. And a clinical psychologist is best placed to help you think about whether a psychological therapy like cognitive behavioural therapy may help.

Clinical psychologists will usually be able to help you see a psychiatrist if that would be helpful for your problem, and psychiatrists will usually be able to help you see a clinical psychologist if they would be more able to help you with your problem.

What is the difference between a clinical psychologist and a therapist or a counsellor?

Clinical psychologists have extensive training in assessing a range of psychological difficulties and determining the most appropriate form of help, as well as being trained in providing more than one type of therapy. Therapists and counsellors, on the other hand, usually specialise in providing one particular type of therapy, like psychodynamic psychotherapy, or counselling, or cognitive behaviour therapy. If you know what form of therapy would be most likely to help your problem, you might go directly to see a therapist or a counsellor.

Therapists and counsellors are not yet legally regulated professions, but many therapists and counsellors voluntarily register with one of the

major professional bodies such as the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy or the British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy.

How can I tell if the clinical psychologist I am seeing is a Registered Psychologist?

If you want to check whether a psychologist is legally registered, from 1 July 2009 you can enter their details on the website of the Health Professions Council – www.hpcheck.org.

Further help

This leaflet was written by the British Psychological Society's Division of Clinical Psychology.

You can find more information on how clinical psychology can help people on our public information website About Clinical Psychology: www.clinicalpsychology.org.uk

The British Psychological Society is the professional organisation for all psychologists.

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 Division of
Clinical Psychology

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