

Counselling for IBD

Introduction

If you have Crohn's Disease or Ulcerative Colitis – the two best known forms of Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) – you may find at times that your illness has a considerable impact on your life. If this is so, you may find it helpful to talk to a counsellor. This information sheet aims to help you understand more about counselling and how to find a counsellor or therapist.

How can counselling help me?

Being told that you have a long-term illness can be a traumatic experience. Not knowing what to expect can leave you feeling shocked, helpless and uncertain. Living with an illness can bring all sorts of feelings such as fear, anger, sadness, and guilt. This can cause emotional difficulties for you and those closest to you.

People with IBD commonly believe that stress can trigger their symptoms. In recent years research suggests they may be right. Although the evidence is limited, some people with disease-related stress found their IBD and their psychological well-being improved after counselling.

So, if you are affected in any of these ways, you may find it helpful to talk to a professional counsellor. It can be difficult facing up to these feelings, but seeking counselling can be seen as a sign of strength.

Counselling offers a private, safe and confidential place to talk about your issues. Counsellors are used to hearing emotional distress, and will not judge you or become emotionally involved in your situation. They are trained not to give advice or tell you what to do, but to listen to you, and to help you make sense of

your feelings. They can offer you support and encouragement in trying to untangle the problems, and examine your interpretation of your illness and its impact on your life.

What kinds of counselling are there?

There are many different kinds of counselling, which you can learn about from organisations such as The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy and The United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapists (see below).

Both counselling and psychotherapy involve talking to someone who is trained to listen and there is no clear distinction between them. Generally, counselling is a talking therapy which helps you deal with specific life issues and may also use art, music, play or other forms of creativity. Psychotherapy is used to deal with deeper issues, exploring past experiences that are still causing distress. Some therapists work in both ways.

Therapy, whether short or long-term, can be one-to-one, in groups or with couples. It can also be by telephone.

Is there specialist counselling for IBD?

Between 1997 and 2001 Crohn's and Colitis UK undertook a project to provide specialist counselling for IBD. This involved giving additional training to some qualified and experienced counsellors on the emotional and physical effects of IBD so that they could help people with Crohn's Disease and Ulcerative Colitis.

Since the end of the Project some of the Counsellors have continued to offer specialist counselling for IBD, either through the NHS or privately. Telephone counselling is also available.

Counsellors are available in the following areas:

- Cambridgeshire: Huntingdon
- Essex: Colchester
- Hertfordshire: Hatfield
- London: City; Barnes
- Wales: Brecon
- West Sussex: Worthing

Dr Gillian Thomas, our Counselling Adviser, also works as an IBD specialist counsellor within the NHS in Reading, Berkshire.

If you would like further details about one of these counsellors, please contact our Information Line (see below).

How can I find a counsellor if there is not a specialist IBD counsellor in my area?

There are a number of ways to find a counsellor. It is worth asking your own doctor first, as your GP surgery may employ a counsellor. GPs can also refer you to counselling services provided by the NHS. In both cases there may be a long waiting list and a limit on the number of sessions you can have.

You may find there are local voluntary sector counselling services, which you can approach directly. Such agencies may offer free counselling or charge according to your income. Again, there is often a waiting list. You could check your local phone book for a list of counselling organisations. You could also contact your library or local Citizens Advice Bureau, who may be able to help.

Another possible source of free counselling may be through your employer, if you are working, or your university or college, if you are a student. If you want to see a private counsellor, you will be charged, but many are willing to negotiate a reduced fee if you are on a low income or claiming benefits. The advantage is that you can pick someone who can see you immediately and, if you

wish, you could arrange a meeting with several before choosing the one you like best.

There are two organisations which can help you to find a trained and qualified counsellor or psychotherapist in your area, either through their websites or by contacting them for a free list:

- The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy
BACP House
15 St John's Business Park
Lutterworth
Leicestershire LE17 4HB
☎ Helpdesk: 01455 883300
Website: www.bacp.co.uk
Email: bacp@bacp.co.uk
- The United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy
2nd Floor, Edward House
2 Wakley Street,
London EC1V 7LT
☎ 020 7014 9955
Website: www.ukcp.org.uk
Email: info@ukcp.org.uk

All counsellors and psychotherapists registered with BACP and UKCP are members of a professional body and have agreed to practise according to a 'Code of Ethics and Practice'.

They also receive regular supervision of their counselling work. This means that they see another professional counsellor or therapist to talk confidentially about their work. This is important for them to keep an open mind and to protect you from poor practice. BACP and UKCP have a complaints procedure and provide information about counselling and psychotherapy and how to choose a counsellor or psychotherapist.

How do I make contact with a counsellor?

Your first contact will probably be by telephone, though some you may be able to contact by email. You can explain

something of your reasons for seeking counselling, so that you and the counsellor can work out whether they might be able to help you.

Counsellors will expect you to ask questions, so feel free to ask about their professional background, the length of sessions and costs and where the counselling will take place. If you agree to have an exploratory meeting you need to know whether you will be charged for this. The first meeting is usually without any obligation to continue into a counselling relationship.

What will happen in the first meeting?

In the first meeting you have an opportunity to decide whether it is worth while to enter into a counselling relationship with this counsellor. It is important that you have confidence in and feel comfortable with any counsellor you might choose. The relationship between you and the therapist is one of the key aspects of a successful outcome.

The counsellor will explain the approach to counselling, discuss confidentiality, the number of sessions, the frequency, the cost and the arrangements for cancellation. It is important to be clear about what you want and what the counsellor is offering. If you feel any hesitation about the counsellor, you are under no obligation and perfectly at liberty to say that you do not wish to continue with them and try another one.

Where can I find other support?

Your health team may include a specialist IBD nurse. Specialist nurses often provide considerable support and usually have a contact number you can call.

You could also call our supportive listening service to talk to one of our trained volunteers with personal experience of IBD:

Crohn's and Colitis Support:
0845 130 3344, open Monday to Friday
1pm – 3.30pm and 6.30pm – 9pm.

Further information

Crohn's and Colitis UK Information Line: 0845 130 2233, open Monday to Friday 10am - 1pm. There is an

answerphone service outside these hours, or you may email

info@crohnsandcolitis.org.uk.

Information staff will help with any IBD related queries.

Crohn's and Colitis UK produces a wide range of information sheets and booklets. These include:

- IBD concerns for young people
- Living with IBD
- Sexual relationships and IBD
- Staying well with IBD
- Talking to my child about my IBD
- When someone in your family has IBD

You can get a copy of any of these from our Information Line. Most are also downloadable from our website:

www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk

© **NACC 2011**

Counselling for IBD

Edition 3

Last review January 2011

Next review due 2013

Crohn's and Colitis UK publications are research based and produced in consultation with patients, medical advisers and other health or associated professionals. They are prepared as general information on a subject with suggestions on how to manage particular situations, but they are not intended to replace specific advice from your own doctor or any other professional. Crohn's and Colitis UK does not endorse or recommend any products mentioned.

We hope that you have found the information helpful and relevant. We welcome any comments from readers, or suggestions for improvements. References or details of the research on which this publication is based, and details of any conflicts of interest, can be obtained

from Crohn's and Colitis UK at the address below. Please send your comments to Helen Terry at Crohn's and Colitis UK, 4 Beaumont House, Sutton Road, St Albans, Herts AL1 5HH, or email h.terry@crohnsandcolitis.org.uk

Crohn's and Colitis UK is the working name for the National Association for Colitis and Crohn's Disease (NACC). NACC is a voluntary Association, established in 1979, which has 30,000 members and 70 Groups throughout the United Kingdom.

Membership of the Association costs £12 a year. New members who are on lower incomes due to their health or employment circumstances may join at a lower rate. Additional donations to help our work are always welcomed.