

HIGHFIELD: Providing an exceptional level of mental health care



Highfield Healthcare

Nick Smith, Clinical Nurse Coordinator at Dublin's Highfield Healthcare, outlines the outstanding level of treatment the facility offers for those with mental health issues.

Highfield Healthcare is run by the Eustace family. It was opened in 1825 and is still very much a family-run facility. It's a very pleasant environment set amongst gorgeous grounds. Our programmes of treatment make great use of our surroundings and we provide general exercise, walking groups, nature groups and outings to local parks and botanical gardens, where people can practice their mindfulness techniques in a tranquil setting.

FITTING TREATMENT AROUND YOUR LIFE

I primarily work at the Hampstead Clinic Day Hospital. We've been up and running for just under two years now. This service is open from 10am until 4pm Monday to Friday, and for additional individual work after the Day Hospital has finished. This allows people to take the kids to school, visit the Day Hospital and then head home in the evening for dinner and to sleep in their own bed. They also have the weekends at home with their families. It works around family life much better than being an inpatient in a hospital. That convenience is really important. Clients can continue to be at home with their family and they don't lose contact. It is very important for a lot of clients that they have that capability.

Clients are referred to us through their GPs and, along with my colleagues in the Day Hospital, I review those referrals and we organise admission to the Day Hospital thereafter. I also manage a team of very experienced staff. We have what we call a 'multi-disciplinary team' and that includes consultant psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists and three very experienced staff nurses.

When people come here for an assessment, it

might be the first time that they've actually sat down and spoken openly about their problems. People find that helpful in itself, to sit down with somebody and open up about what difficulties they have had in the past or are having now. Men, especially, need to become better at reaching out for help.

Attitudes to mental health are improving, but there is still a large percentage of people who find it difficult to open up about mental health issues. How we approach the work at Hampstead Clinic Day Hospital can break down those barriers. We want to make it as easy as possible for people to voice their concerns.

In the Day Hospital we have a programme that spans five weeks. Throughout that time, clients have group work with psychologists and social workers; and individual work with occupational therapists. The individual links in with their consultant psychiatrist throughout the week, so as to monitor where they are at with their overall psychological wellbeing. They would also link in with the experienced nursing staff and make sure that if anything needs to be brought to the team's attention, it is done straight away.

THOROUGH ASSESSMENT

People need different levels of engagement with the various treatments we provide. I set aside two-and-a-half hours to do the initial assessment in the Day Hospital because I think we should get to know each individual client as well as we can during the early stages of treatment.

We look at the problems they are presenting, what symptoms they are suffering from, but also at their younger years and how their childhood and upbringing may be affecting their mental health. It's a really thorough assessment and a number of clients have told me, over the years, how helpful they've found it. The staff at Highfield Healthcare regularly get complimented on how thorough the process is.

In terms of therapy, we cover disciplines like

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), which is based on the concept that thoughts, feelings, physical sensations and actions are interconnected. The negative thoughts and feelings can trap people into a vicious cycle and CBT attempts to deal with the problems that arise from this in a more positive way, by breaking them down into smaller parts. It's a very effective form of therapy for depression and anxiety. It's something that we do in both group and individual settings.

Mindfulness has also become a big part of our programme and between midday and 12:30, time is set aside for clients to engage in mindful therapy. The idea with mindfulness is to pay attention to the present moment, our thoughts and feelings, and the world around us.

When we become more aware of the present moment we begin to experience things in a different way. Mindfulness allows us to experience our stream of thoughts and feelings and allows us to take a step back and observe certain patterns. Some may have not practised mindfulness prior to coming to the hospital, but are then really keen to continue with it once they have completed their treatment with us.

Treatments provided at the Hampstead Clinic Day Hospital

- **Art Therapy**
- **Clinical Psychology**
- **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)**
- **Counselling**
- **Mindfulness**
- **Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)**
- **Occupational Therapy**
- **Wellbeing Programmes**
- **Neuropsychology**

With clients coming to the Day Hospital, we tend to see issues like anxiety, which can include problems like social anxiety and generalised anxiety disorder; we see people who are depressed, in a low mood, people with bipolar conditions; and we also have people in the Day Hospital who may suffer from psychosis.

If people are struggling at home or at work, I would always encourage them to go and talk to somebody. Go and contact your GP. Talk to the GP about what might be on offer in the locality. What I've found, over the years, is that people say, "If only I'd done this earlier, things might have been easier for me." It's really important to talk and let someone know that you are struggling. As soon as that is done everything else becomes easier.

GPs can find more information on the referrals process, as well as the Hampstead Clinic Brochure, by visiting highfieldhealthcare.ie/referrals

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