

Understanding Psychiatric Assessment

Psychiatric assessment is a careful and structured process designed to understand your mental health concerns, how they affect your life, and what type of care may be helpful.

This leaflet explains what psychiatric assessment involves and why it often takes time.

What Is a Psychiatric Assessment?

A psychiatric assessment is a clinical evaluation that may include:

- Discussion of your current symptoms and concerns
- Review of personal, medical, and mental health history
- Assessment of mood, anxiety, thinking, and behaviour
- Consideration of risk and safety
- Review of functioning at work, home, and socially

The goal is to develop a **clear and accurate understanding** of your situation.

Why Assessment Takes Time

Mental health conditions can:

- Overlap in symptoms
- Change over time
- Be influenced by life circumstances, stress, and physical health

For these reasons, psychiatric assessment is often **an ongoing process**, rather than a single event.

In some cases, it is not appropriate or safe to make immediate conclusions.

Diagnosis in Psychiatry

A diagnosis may:

- Help guide treatment
- Change as more information becomes available
- Be reviewed over time

Not all patients receive a diagnosis at the first appointment.
The absence of an immediate diagnosis does not mean concerns are not taken seriously.

Information from Different Sources

Assessment may involve information from:

- You
- Your GP
- Previous treating clinicians
- Medical records or reports

With your consent, gathering information from multiple sources helps improve accuracy and safety.

Role of Questionnaires and Scales

Questionnaires or rating scales may be used to:

- Assist in understanding symptoms
- Monitor changes over time

These tools support assessment but **do not replace clinical judgement**.

Risk Assessment

Assessment includes consideration of:

- Your safety
- Risks related to mental health symptoms
- Factors that may require closer monitoring

Risk assessment is a routine and essential part of psychiatric care.

Assessment Versus Treatment

Assessment and treatment are closely linked but not identical.

Treatment decisions are made based on:

- Assessment findings
- Clinical judgement
- Response over time

In some cases, further assessment is needed before treatment decisions are finalised.

Your Role in the Assessment Process

You can support the assessment process by:

- Providing accurate information
- Sharing concerns openly
- Attending follow-up appointments
- Discussing changes in symptoms

Psychiatric assessment works best as a **collaborative process**.

Questions and Clarification

If you have questions about your assessment or how decisions are made, these can be discussed during your appointments.

Understanding the assessment process can help reduce uncertainty and support effective care.
