

# What happens in the Emergency Department

A patient's guide



# A guide for people who have self-harmed or may have mental health/emotional problems

## **Why have I been given this leaflet?**

This leaflet is for anyone who has come to the Emergency Department because they have harmed themselves or are in a crisis situation and may have mental health problems. It explains what is likely to happen over the next few hours.

We understand that this must be a difficult time for you and that you may be struggling to cope. We are committed to giving you the best care we can and aim to treat you as quickly as possible.

## What happens when I go to the Emergency Department after I have harmed myself or if I am thinking about suicide?

There are a few steps that usually happen. These are listed below. The rest of this leaflet will give you more detail about each step.

1. After you have given the receptionist your details, they will ask you to have a seat in the waiting room until the nurse can assess you. The nurse will call you into a room to do a quick assessment, see what your main problems are and decide how quickly you need further attention and support.
2. You may have to wait a while to see the next health professional.
3. When you are seen by the next health professional, you will be treated for any physical health problems. They will also ask you some questions about your thoughts and feelings.
4. Depending on the outcome of this assessment, a member of the Mental Health Team may come and speak to you. Sometimes this will not be necessary and an appointment with a member of the Mental Health Team will be arranged for the next day instead. You will be given advice on how to keep safe until you attend your appointment the next day. This type of appointment is known as a 'Card Before You Leave appointment'.
5. In some cases, the doctor may want you to go into the main hospital for further assessment or to get the care you need.

## What should I do while waiting?

Try to stay calm. Staff will see you as quickly as possible. Read the rest of this leaflet if you can.

## What should I do if I am getting more distressed while I am waiting?

**Please do not leave the Emergency Department.** If you are becoming very distressed and planning to walk out, please ask to speak to a member of staff and explain your concerns. They will try to speed things up for you if possible and may be able to provide additional support while you are waiting.

## What happens if I decide to leave the Emergency Department before staff have finished caring for me?

**It is very important to wait until you have been advised you can leave.** If you leave without discussing it with the doctor, hospital staff must act in your best interests. This may include calling security staff or police to bring you back for further care if they are concerned about any risks to yourself or others.

## What happens when I see the doctor or nurse?

If you have any injuries or other physical health problems, they will begin any necessary treatment. They will also ask you some questions about your thoughts and feelings. It is important to be as honest as you can so they can get you the help you need.

## Will I have to stay overnight in hospital?

Every person's needs are different. Many people are able to go home again following their visit to the Emergency Department. However, sometimes it is necessary to stay in hospital for a period of further assessment or treatment. The staff will advise on what is best for you when they have fully assessed your situation.

## What happens if I have taken alcohol or drugs?

It all depends on how much you have taken and how long ago you took it. You should be honest with hospital staff about the amount and type of alcohol or drugs you have taken. They will not report any drug use to the police. It is important not to take any more alcohol or drugs while you are waiting to be seen.

If you have taken alcohol or drugs, staff may not be able to assess you properly. They may ask you to stay for a while until the effects have worn off so they can speak to you when you are able to think more clearly.

## Will I see someone from the Mental Health Team?

Every person's needs are different but usually you will be asked to speak to someone from the Mental Health Team. In some cases, you may not have to wait, but you will be asked to attend an appointment with the Mental Health Team the next day.

If you are asked to come back to see the Mental Health Team the next day, staff will give you a card with details of the time and place you have to attend ('Card Before You Leave' appointment). The card will have emergency numbers on it in case things change when you get back home or you need support at another time. If you have a friend or relative with you, they should receive a card as well, in case you lose yours or forget about it. Staff will ask for your permission to provide an additional appointment card to your friend or relative.

Before you go home, staff will check they have your correct phone number so you can be contacted the next day if necessary. In some Trust areas, you may receive a reminder phone call in the morning.

**You should attend your appointment at the time on the card unless you are told otherwise.**

If you cannot attend the appointment, it is very important to phone the number on the card and let them know you can't attend. The person on the phone will offer you another appointment.

## **What will happen when I see the person from the Mental Health Team?**

The person from the Mental Health Team will talk to you about your feelings and the problems that have led to you coming to the Emergency Department. They will tell you about other services that can help you, for example counselling or support services for relationships, drugs and alcohol, debt, housing, employment etc. They will also be able to assess whether you need any follow-up care or support in relation to your mental health and, if necessary, will arrange to see you again.

## **What if I do not want to speak to someone from the Mental Health Team?**

There are great benefits from speaking to the Mental Health Team or your GP. There is evidence that people who have self-harmed may be less likely to harm themselves again if they are assessed by a mental health professional and given appropriate advice and support. However, if you do not want this to happen, please discuss your concerns with the doctor or nurse in the Emergency Department, who will give you appropriate advice.

## Are there other services that can help me?

Yes, there is plenty of help available but it is best to discuss this with a member of the Mental Health Team or your GP to work out what is best for you as some services do not accept self-referrals. **Pages 9-11 of this leaflet provide advice on what to do in a crisis, useful contact details and how to find out more about services in your area.**

If you decide that you don't want the services offered, you should keep any information you are given in case you change your mind. You can always talk to your GP about what services could help you.

## Is there any information for my family and/or friends who are looking after me?

Yes, we have a booklet especially for family and/or friends. Please ask the doctor or nurse about it.

## How can I give feedback on my experience in the Emergency Department?

We are keen to hear your views on the care you receive. If you are unhappy with any aspect of your care, you can ask to speak to the manager or enquire about how to make a complaint.

Each Trust has a Complaints Department through which you can pass on your concerns. This department is also happy to receive comments about positive experiences or suggestions on how things could be improved.

You can also contact the Patient Client Council by phone: 0800 917 0222 or email: [info.pcc@hscni.net](mailto:info.pcc@hscni.net)



## Getting help in a crisis

**If you have done something to seriously harm yourself, you should go to a hospital Emergency Department or call 999 if more urgent assistance is required.**

If you have not harmed yourself but feel you are at risk of suicide or need to speak to someone urgently about your mental health, you can:

- make an emergency appointment with your GP or GP out-of-hours service (see below) – the GP can arrange for you to see someone from the mental health team urgently;
- go to a hospital Emergency Department;
- call the emergency numbers in your Care Plan (people who are being treated for a mental illness may have a Care Plan that has emergency contact details).

## Useful contacts

### Emergencies

Call 999

### GP out-of-hours services

North and West Belfast	Tel: 028 9074 4447
South and East Belfast	Tel: 028 9079 6220
Southern Trust Area	Tel: 028 3839 9201
North Down and Ards	Tel: 028 9182 2344
Lisburn and Downpatrick	Tel: 028 9260 2204
Northern Trust Area	Tel: 028 2566 3500
Western Trust Area	Tel: 028 7186 5195

## Helplines

### Lifeline

If you, or someone you know, is in distress or despair, call Lifeline free on **0808 808 8000**. Calls are free from all landlines and most mobiles. (Textphone: **18001 808 8000**)



Calls to Lifeline are answered by trained counsellors who can provide help and support. Counsellors are experienced in dealing with self-harm, suicidal thoughts and many other issues. Lines are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

### Samaritans

Tel: 08457 90 90 90

[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

Email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

### Childline

Tel: 0800 1111

[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

## Local support organisations

Ask the staff in the Emergency Department for your local *Directory of services to help improve mental health and emotional wellbeing*.

This is also available to download at:

[www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/directory-services-help-improve-mental-health-and-emotional-wellbeing](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/directory-services-help-improve-mental-health-and-emotional-wellbeing)

Alternatively you can visit the 'Minding Your Head' website for a list of local services.

[www.mindingyourhead.info](http://www.mindingyourhead.info)



## External websites

Take care using websites as occasionally they can appear to encourage self-harm. Some people who have self-harmed have found the following websites useful:

[www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/atozindex.aspx](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/atozindex.aspx)

[www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)

[www.harmless.org.uk](http://www.harmless.org.uk)

[www.lifesigns.org.uk](http://www.lifesigns.org.uk)

[www.thesite.org/mental-health/self-harm](http://www.thesite.org/mental-health/self-harm)



**Public Health Agency**

4th Floor, 12-22 Linenhall Street, Belfast BT2 8BS.

Tel: 0300 555 0114 (local rate).

[www.publichealth.hscni.net](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net)

Find us on:



**You**Tube