

Functional Neurological Group-based Course (FNG) Referral Criteria

What is it?

The Functional Neurological Group (FNG) is a time-limited multi-disciplinary course based in the Royal Hampshire County Hospital (RHCH) for adults with a diagnosis of Functional Neurological Disorder (FND). The course offers between six and eight two-hour sessions, and is facilitated by:

- Dr Ben Papps, Consultant Clinical Neuropsychologist
- Dr Claudio Ruffmann, Consultant Neurologist
- Kim Morley, Nurse Specialist in Epilepsy and Midwifery
- Dr Astri Ablitt, Clinical Neuropsychologist
- Dr Philippa Beckwith, Clinical Psychologist
- Steve Williams, Specialist Neuro-physiotherapist
- Nick Coulson, Assistant Psychologist

The group content is adapted from the CBT manual for FND called *Overcoming Functional Symptoms: A Five Areas Approach*¹, and aims to help people better understand their symptoms, identify factors that can influence their symptoms, and find ways to manage the impact of their symptoms on their wellbeing and everyday functioning. It is the only neuropsychological service offered to those with FND; there is no alternative one-to-one based service.

Who is the service for?

We accept referrals for adults living in the community who are experiencing psychological difficulties related to FND.

To be eligible for the service, clients must fulfil ALL of the following criteria:

1. The client must have a *formal diagnosis* of FND, made by the HHFT Neurology team

Examples of symptoms of FND may include:

- Non-epileptic attack disorder
- Dissociative blackouts
- Sensory disturbances
- Weakness or paresis
- Functional movement disorders
- Speech disorders

2. The diagnosis and diagnostic reasoning must have been explained to the client, and they must indicate understanding of this

The client must have understood the principles of non-organic presentations and that there is a rationale for the diagnosis of FND. Clients struggling with *acceptance* of FND may still be eligible if they can show that they have understood the diagnosis, clinical reasoning behind it, and are open and prepared to learn more about FND and to try new strategies.

3. The functional symptoms are causing significant psychological distress, or are having a significant impact on work or their social life.

If mental health difficulties do not primarily relate to the functional symptoms, they may be more suited to other services, such as iTalk or CMHT.

Who do we exclude?

We do not work with:

- 1. People under 16 or under 18 if they are still in full time education - please refer to Child Services**

¹ Williams, C., Kent, C., Smith, S., Carson, A., Sharpe, M., & Cavanagh, J. (2011). *Overcoming Functional Neurological Symptoms: A Five Areas Approach*. Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge.

2. People unable to commit to attending ALL group sessions, arriving at the start time and leaving at the finish time

All sessions of the course are essential, and the content builds on previous sessions. Therefore, the group may not be right for clients who are, at present, struggling to attend routine hospital appointments.

3. People unable to engage in a group context

Please consider that the group may not be suitable for clients who:

- Have non-epileptic attacks of a frequency that makes attending a group-based course difficult
- Are at risk of experiencing significant distress or post-traumatic reactions (PTSD) triggered by group discussion
- Have severe challenging behaviour, including problems with physical aggression
- Have indicated that they do not find psychological approaches or 'CBT' helpful
- Have asked for one-to-one based support in relation to the FND or who indicate that they do not find group formats helpful

4. People who have an active suicide risk and/or are currently under the care of CMHT

Please note we are not a crisis service; we do not have the resources to monitor suicide risk and are unable to take clinical responsibility for this.

5. Those who are actively abusing drugs and/or alcohol. Please refer to local drug and alcohol services

6. People with dementia - please refer to Older Adult CMHT who will also assess those with dementia under 65

7. People unable to take notes or hold a pen.

Exceptions may be made if attendees are able to bring their own assistive devices.

What area do we cover?

The service is primarily designed for people living in Hampshire (HHFT area: This includes people living in Andover, Basingstoke, Eastleigh and Winchester as well as the surrounding towns and villages across Hampshire and parts of west Berkshire including Tadley to the north; Alton and Bordon to the east; Romsey and Chandlers Ford to the south, Stockbridge, Bishops Waltham and Alresford) but we may consider referrals from other areas if the patient fits the above criteria and is able to arrange their own transport.

How to refer to the FNG?

We only accept referrals from the Neurology team operating in Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (HHFT). If you would like to refer a patient to the FNG, please refer to the HHFT Neurology team.

Please visit the following website for contact details and more information about the Neurology team at HHFT: <https://www.hampshirehospitals.nhs.uk/our-services/a-z-departments-and-specialities/n/neurology.aspx>

What will happen next?

Upon receipt of referral, this will be assessed for suitability, to ensure that we are the best service to help.

If a decision to include has been made, the client will be placed on a waiting list for the next available run of the FNG. Prior to the group starting, clients on the waiting list will be invited to attend an introduction/'taster' talk, where further assessment for suitability will take place.