

Information for concerned people

We have tried to prepare hereafter a number of guides and information brochures which may help you, all about the topic migration and mental health. In addition, we have gathered the “frequently asked questions” of affected people for you. These will soon be translated into all languages mentioned on our website.

Information is now available in the following languages:

- Arabic
- English
- French
- Hebrew
- Italian
- Persian
- Polish
- Russian
- Serbian/Croatian
- Spanish and
- Turkish

(This list makes no claim to completeness. Any additional information from your side is welcome. Please contact our editorial office at info@dtppp.com)

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is a psychotherapy?

Psychotherapy is the professional treatment of disorders with psychological means. The most common mental disorders are depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders and psychosomatic disorders - such as pain, for example, for which no medical cause can be found. Psychotherapy is the treatment of mental and psychosomatic disorders with pathological significance. Psychotherapeutic measures may also be applied in addition to a medical pain treatment and in patients with stressful and chronic physical illness, provided that a syndrome with pathological significance is diagnosed by means of symptoms, such as, for example, anxiety, depression, severe sleep disturbances or pain.

What is a mental disorder?

In Western culture, physicians and therapists often distinguish between two major groups of diseases - physical and mental disorders. Mental disorder patterns usually change a person's experience and behaviour in such a strong way that this affects the person's professional, private and/or social competence. This strict distinction is, however, problematic, since mental disorders may also come along with physical disorders ("my heart is in my mouth", "worries are giving me ulcers"), and enduring physical diseases may, of course, also have an influence on one's mood. That is why many physicians and therapists ask a lot of detailed questions and appreciate receiving as detailed answers as possible which enables them to make the correct diagnosis. Mental disorders or diseases may have their origin in acute or enduring stress or are due to biological factors (hereditary disposition). Very often the origins of these factors are mixed.

How are mental disorders treated in Germany?

Mental disorders are treated with medication, with psychotherapy and various accompanying forms of therapy (e.g. occupational therapy, art therapy, hands-on therapy and music therapy). The social therapeutic assistance and the support from the social environment - such as the patient's family - play an important role in the treatment of mental disorders. In Western culture, physicians and therapists attach great importance to the patient's own activities during the treatment and when it comes to coping with mental disorders (for example to pay attention to a healthy nutrition in order to bring your diabetic condition under control or to abstain from drinking coffee after 7 o'clock in the evening in order to have a better sleep). Depending on the severity of the disease, there is the option between an outpatient or inpatient psychotherapeutic treatment. It is important that you get a very thorough medical examination in order to find the most adequate treatment for your needs.

What is Transcultural Psychiatry/Psychotherapy?

When we speak about culture, we mean the influence of a social group in which a person lives - a young woman from a village in Austria, for example, might have another culture than an elderly man from Istanbul in Turkey. Very often we also use the expressions "intercultural psychotherapy" or "cross cultural psychiatry" etc. In addition to many different nuances, these disciplines primarily deal with similarities and differences of mental disorders in different cultures. How can an adequate treatment be successful if patient and practitioner are strangers to each other? What can be done to overcome such feelings of alienness?

Transcultural Psychiatry/Psychotherapy focuses on the special needs of patients with a migration background as well as on the needs of the clinic employees who want to contribute their share to a preferably adequate treatment of all patients. This includes, for example, the consideration of the patient's own ideas about the disease, shaped by his culture, the clinic employee's reflection on his own prejudices, knowledge about the use of interpreters etc..

Who are psychotherapists?

There are 3 professional groups working in the specialized psychotherapeutic care system in Germany: physicians who work as medical psychotherapists, graduated

psychologists who work as psychological psychotherapists and child and youth psychotherapists.

Medical psychotherapists are physicians who have passed a specialized training course after their medical studies. These are: specialists in psychosomatic medicine and psychotherapy, specialists in psychiatry and psychotherapy, and other physicians with a specialisation in psychotherapy. As a matter of principle, physicians can charge the compulsory health insurance funds directly for their services. Some health centres, however, only accept privately insured patients for treatment.

Psychological psychotherapists are graduated psychologists who follow a 5-year specialized training course in the field of psychotherapy after their studies. In Germany, the term "Psychological Psychotherapist" is a job title protected by law which entitles the holder to exercise medical science.

As a matter of principle, psychological psychotherapists can charge the compulsory health insurance funds directly for their services. Some health centres, however, only accept privately insured patients for treatment.

Child and youth therapists may have different basic professions - very often they have graduated in psychology or education. Similar to psychological psychotherapists, they pass a specialized training course of several years after their studies and they are also in a position to charge the compulsory health insurance funds directly for their services.

How can I find an adequate therapeutic place in an inpatient clinic for me?

Patients with a migration background very often require a culturally sensitive approach in their treatment. If you have the feeling that you require a psychotherapeutic treatment which is adapted to your cultural background, then you have found the right place in the clinics which dispose of a multi-cultural, culturally sensitive and competent team. Meanwhile a wide number of clinics is advertising with special offers for immigrants. These clinics usually employ therapists who have passed a specialized training course in Transcultural Psychiatry and psychotherapy. They provide either native-language therapies or carry out such therapies with the assistance of graduate interpreters.

How can I find an adequate psychotherapy place in an outpatient clinic for me?

According to scientific studies, most patients are in a position to carefully assess whether they can get on with their therapist after only a few trial sessions. There should be mutual sympathy and respect and the patient should have the feeling that he can trust the therapist. Therefore it is, first of all, recommended to agree on an appointment for an exploratory session ("trial session"). If the therapist is approved by the compulsory health insurance funds, the costs for this first appointment will be borne by these. If you are a patient with a compulsory health insurance, you are entitled to have 5 trial sessions with one therapist. The regulations for privately insured patients vary with each of the private insurers and it is therefore suggested to clarify details prior to treatment or to check the contract and see what agreement has been taken concerning the reimbursement of the costs of a psychotherapeutic treatment.

If you have the feeling that you require a psychotherapeutic treatment which is adapted to your cultural background, then you are right with those psychotherapists who have passed a specialized training course in the field of psychotherapy. Unfortunately, long waiting times are quite common in many regions of the German-speaking countries (in Düsseldorf up to several months). If, in case of severe problems, you feel that you cannot wait such a long time, we suggest that you contact a nearby inpatient clinic or a counselling centre until you start an outpatient therapy.

What opportunities do you have if there is no therapy place available for you?

Long waiting times with psychotherapists are unfortunately very common, since there are not enough outpatient clinics compared to the needs of the patients. It is therefore often recommended to contact several therapists at the same time. Take notes, if possible, during your search for a vacant place and write down how long the waiting times have been with the contacted psychotherapists. You may then forward these notes to your compulsory health insurance fund and may request that the costs for a psychotherapist who is not approved will be taken over by the insurer. Article 13.3., book 5, of the Social Security Code (Germany) stipulates as follows: "If the compulsory health insurance fund could not perform urgent services in time or has wrongly declined the performance of these, and if this refusal has caused costs to the insured persons because they had to settle these by themselves, these costs are to be reimbursed by the compulsory health insurance fund in the full amount, provided that the services used have been necessary."