What do we mean by psychometric assessment and testing?

The terms above refer to a range of tests and assessments, from those carried out by people who are trained in such techniques as part of their training and professional practice through to those which are used by the public as ‘self report’ measures.

Psychometric tests aim to measure a particular aspect or aspects of a person’s functioning. For example, IQ tests ‘measure’ how intelligent someone is – although understanding a person’s strengths and weaknesses can be more meaningful in terms of helping people to cope better. Other tests look at what kind of personality or aptitudes people have, and are sometimes used to find out if a person has the particular qualities needed for a job. If people have psychological problems such as depression or memory difficulties, psychometric tests can also contribute to decisions about whether this is at the level which means they should be offered specialist help.

Psychometric tests are commonly made up of a series of questions, with scores attached to each answer that can be added up to provide an overall score. Sometimes, a test may also include undertaking a short task within a timescale. Some tests can now be done on a computer.

Psychometric tests are often used with individuals as part of their routine care.

This may be as part of an initial assessment, as well as to review progress or measure the benefits of therapy. They are also commonly used for research and evaluation purposes as they are particularly useful for measuring the benefits of different types of care, and for evaluating new approaches to demonstrate if they are of value.

Psychometric tests are not just used in the NHS, but in education, recruitment, and the law.

How are psychometric tests developed?

Some psychometric tests have undergone rigorous development over many years and have been standardised (tested out) on large populations, during extensive research. This increases their reliability (the degree to which the results will be generally similar on repeated occasions, within a margin of error) and validity (whether the tests measure what they set out to measure).

Staff who use these kinds of standardised tests must be registered to apply them and have specific training in their administration and scoring, or they must ensure that they are used under supervision. Some of these test materials must be kept confidential, as their usefulness depends on their content not being known in advance by the person to whom they are applied.

Examples of tests like this include some of those looking at intelligence, achievement or personality. These tests are also subject to copyright restrictions, often including the scoring sheets. Most psychological services within the Trust will have such measures in their ‘test cupboards’ and named individuals, usually the service lead, will have overall responsibility for ensuring their correct use. Such measures may be used by psychologists in court proceedings.
Other assessments may require specific training and clinical experience (rather than registration as a user) to apply, and staff must always ensure - if this is required - that the training is received before these measures are used in practice. In these respects, staff are bound by their professional codes of practice which require them to only undertake tasks that fall within their competence. Examples of tests falling into this category include diagnostic inventories, some personality assessments and some extensively researched risk assessments.

In day to day clinical work, staff may also use a range of assessments to help individuals to monitor their progress during therapy, such as clinician devised diaries and self report tools available for specific therapies. Often these are not subject to copyright restrictions, but individual clinicians must ensure that they are used appropriately.

**What happens when someone using Mersey Care services undergoes psychometric evaluation?**

Patients and service users should always give informed consent to participating in psychological assessments. Where the person lacks capacity, then the legal framework needs to be considered. Good practice requires the clinician to explain the nature of the psychometric assessment to the individual and to also explain how the results will be used and reported, including for any legal proceedings.

Some psychometric tests used, for example, to look at brain functioning, can produce information that may distress the individual concerned and their family. It is therefore crucial that such information is provided and explained sensitively, and that follow-up support is available.

Psychometric assessments become part of the clinical record for the individual using services and as such are subject to Trust policies on clinical record keeping. Because of the importance of avoiding widespread familiarity with test items, and the risks of erroneous interpretation of raw scores (the scores for individual test questions) test sheets are usually stored in a separate folder to the main patient record or, with electronic systems, in a restricted area. However, they still remain part of the clinical record and access can be requested by a service user, tribunal or court of law.

The only exception to the above is when service users complete psychometric tests anonymously as part of a research project or service evaluation project. All such projects require the researchers to follow correct guidelines on the use, storage and disposal of test results.

In general, such evaluations are helpful to a service user and their clinician in developing a shared understanding of the individual’s needs and how psychological therapies may help the individual during the course of clinical interventions. Such evaluations may also help to show progress that has been made over the course of therapy by inviting the person to complete them before and after their period of attendance, and sometimes at a follow-up meeting some time later.

*I feel that the questionnaires are helpful because they show me that I am improving. I can sometimes feel I am not getting any better but the questionnaires show me that I am.*

User of Mersey Care Psychological Services

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**Safeguarding the rights of service users**

*The right to refuse to take a psychometric test should always be made clear to a service user alongside the benefits to them of agreeing.*

*A service user should also be made aware of their right to see a summary of the results, presented in a format that they can easily understand.*
Who can use psychometric assessments?

As mentioned earlier, some tests have restricted use. Others may be used by individuals who have received some psychological training and understand the nature and purpose of the assessment. Other techniques are designed for self-administration and scoring; or for ongoing use during e.g. psychological therapy where a rating scale might be completed at each session.

A matrix of psychological assessments and tests being used in Mersey Care has been developed to provide clarity, including information about those for which use is restricted. This document is available to staff on the Mersey Care shared drive. *Psychometric Assessments and Tests* provides details of: the name of the test; the focus of it; whether it is copyrighted, how validity and reliability have been achieved and user guidelines.

Any staff member in any doubt as to whether they can use a particular test should consult the list. Under no circumstances must any staff photocopy copyrighted materials. Nor should measures be used by any member of staff without the required clinical qualifications or experience outlined, or without a service user giving their informed consent.

**Interpreting psychometric assessments and tests**

As referred to above, some tests have undergone extensive research on large populations and interpretation of those test results may require training or reference to a scoring manual. Expert knowledge and understanding may be required in the interpretation of test results and this should not be undertaken without the necessary competencies. Such expertise may also be required about the presentation of test results in the form of reports, especially those which will become part of legal proceedings.

Staff with more limited training in the use of psychometric assessments should always seek advice on these matters from a colleague with relevant training in test administration and interpretation.

Where are psychometric assessments stored?

Many of the assessments referred to in this information sheet are costly and have been purchased by psychological services in different parts of the Trust. These services will have systems in place to ensure that tests are ‘booked out’ for use and that consumable items, such as scoring sheets are purchased on a regular basis. Psychological Service Leads for individual CBUs will be able to address any queries in relation to where test materials may be stored and procedures for their use.

Where can I go for further information?

The Trust Lead for Psychological Practice, Tricia.Hagan@merseycare.nhs.uk will be happy to respond to general enquiries about professional issues related to the use of psychometric assessments and tests. Specific advice may also be obtained from the Head of Psychological Services for an individual CBU. These are as follows:

- SaFE: Sarah Finlayson
- High Secure: Ryan Aguiar
- PCP: Sheila Hamilton
- Rebuild: Richard Whitehead
- Liverpool: Jane Jamieson

If you would like to know more about psychometric testing, an excellent source is the BPS (British Psychological Society) Psychological Testing Centre website at [http://www.psychtesting.org.uk/](http://www.psychtesting.org.uk/) which provides comprehensive information and services relating to standards in tests and testing for test takers, test users, test developers and members of the public.

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