

March 2023

# **NHS Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service South East: Q&A**

## **GENERAL**

### **What is Op COURAGE?**

Op COURAGE: The Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service provides specialist treatment and support for those due to leave the armed forces, reservists and those who've already left. Developed by veterans, for veterans, Op COURAGE is available across England and since 2017, has helped nearly 30,000 people. There are six regional services which are planned and funded directly by NHS England.

### **What is changing nationally from 1 April 2023?**

Op COURAGE The NHS Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service will replace the three individual specialist services.

- NHS Transition, Intervention and Liaison Service (TILS)
- NHS Complex Treatment Service (CTS)
- NHS High Intensity Service (HIS)

These separate names will no longer be used, but the same specialist support will still be available.

In some regions there will be a change in the organisations providing Op COURAGE and how to make a referral.

### **What is changing in the South East region from 1 April 2023?**

- All OP COURAGE mental health referrals for veterans living in the South East will be handled by The Gateway, a single team for mental health referrals at Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust which already handles Op COURAGE referrals for South Central and South West England. This replaces multiple ways to access the service which were previously in place.
- Berkshire Healthcare is now the lead provider of Op COURAGE services across eight counties in the South East.
- There are several key changes to referral routes and regions in Southern England:

<p><b>South East:</b></p> <p><b>Kent Surrey and Sussex</b></p>	<p><b>South Central:</b></p> <p><b>Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight and Oxfordshire</b></p>	<p><b>South West:</b></p> <p><b>Bristol, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire.</b></p>
<p>There will be one completely new point of referral for veterans' mental health services, provided by The Gateway referral team at Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust.</p>	<p>The Gateway referral team at Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, which already handles the majority of Op COURAGE referrals in the area, will now also handle referrals for the HIS element of the service too.</p>	<p>The Gateway will no longer handle referrals for Op COURAGE in the South West of England.</p>
<p>London and South East services are now provided completely separately.</p>	<p>The South Central region is now part of a larger South East region.</p>	

## What is not changing?

- The same level and type of support will be available
- Op COURAGE NHS assessment, care and treatment will continue to be provided by:
  - **Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust**
  - **Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust**
- **Walking With The Wounded** will continue to provide veteran liaison peer support workers for veterans in crisis, or at risk of mental health crisis, who are accessing mainstream crisis and inpatient mental health services.

## Why is this happening?

There are several benefits to creating one single point of access across the region, these include:

- Fewer NHS assessments, removing duplication and improving patient experiences so that veterans don't have to repeat information that may be distressing
- Greater consistency with one standard triage process
- Easier to promote and encourage self-referrals, reducing the amount of time veterans have untreated mental illness and making a full recovery more likely.

## Is this about cutting costs?

No, the same level of service will be available. The changes are motivated by the desire to improve patient experiences while helping more veterans access the help they need.

## How many people will this affect?

Over 30,000 veterans accessed Op COURAGE services across England in the five years to 2022 but the real level of need is thought to be much higher.

Just under 4% of the adult population in England and Wales, 1.9 million people, report they have previously served in the UK armed forces (ONS 2021)

Around 1 in 4 people experience a mental health issue at any time. While some veterans may be treated directly by mainstream mental health services, NHS data suggests many delay coming forward for help, waiting many years before speaking to a professional about their difficulties.

## Where can I find out more?

- Visit [www.opcourage-southeast.nhs.uk](http://www.opcourage-southeast.nhs.uk) from 1 April
- Find out about Op Courage at [www.nhs.uk/opcourage](http://www.nhs.uk/opcourage)

## FOR PATIENTS

### Will my care and treatment change?

There will be no disruption to patients' care and treatment and in most cases, the clinician who is currently supporting you will continue to work with you. Where this is not possible, we will ensure you are introduced to your new clinician in a timely way and will work with you to ensure you feel listened to and supported with your ongoing care. If you are booked in for an assessment this will go ahead as arranged, or if you are awaiting therapy, you will be offered this as soon as a space becomes available.

### Will I still see the same person?

For most people the answer is yes. A very small number of patients currently being supported by the High Intensity Service may have a new clinician. We are working with these veterans on an individual basis to make sure they have continuity of care and a smooth transition which is as seamless as possible.

### Will I travel further for treatment?

No, the changes will not affect where people receive treatment and support. Current providers in the region will continue to deliver the service through a variety of local venue options, online by virtual video call and by phone with the same level of choice available.

## **FOR REFERRERS**

### **Is the referral criteria changing?**

Op COURAGE South East still has the same core criteria. To access this service you must:

- Be resident in England.
- Have served in the UK armed forces for a full day
- Be registered, or willing to be registered, with a GP practice in the South East region: Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, Kent, Oxfordshire, Surrey, Sussex.
- Provide the veteran's military service number

One significant change is that we can now see service leavers who have a discharge date within the next six months instead of three months – to be better able to support those transitioning to civilian life.

### **Can people self-refer for HIS support now?**

Only health and care professionals in mental health crisis and inpatient services can refer veterans for this type of support. The criteria for this aspect of the service hasn't changed.

### **What happens if I make a referral through the old routes?**

We have transition plans in place so that people referring in will get to the right service but we encourage referrers to start using The Gateway from now onwards to help support us in implementing the changes and avoid any possibility of a delay in processing referrals.

### **Is the Afghan Warm Welcome service included in the changes?**

No. This is a specialist part of the Op COURAGE service that sits outside of the three legacy services that are coming together as part of this change.

Camden and Islington NHS Foundation Trust will continue to handle referrals to the Afghan Warm Welcome service. This referral pathway remains the same.

### **Are the contact details for the local service changing?**

No. Contact details for your local Op COURAGE clinical team remain the same. They can be contacted if you have a query about the service or about the suitability of a referral which needs more detailed information that the referral team can provide.

- **Kent, Surrey, Sussex Op COURAGE**

Call 0300 304 0657

Email [spnt.tils@nhs.net](mailto:spnt.tils@nhs.net)

- **Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hampshire, Isle of Wight and Oxfordshire Op COURAGE**

Call 0118 214 3262

Email [opcourage@berkshire.nhs.uk](mailto:opcourage@berkshire.nhs.uk)