

# Mental Health Professionals

Clients should remember that mental health professionals are providing care and service to them. Clients have the right to understand the recommended treatments and alternatives and can discuss with their provider why the provider recommends the particular treatment and interventions. If the client isn't making progress toward goals after meeting, they can look for a different provider.

In psychotherapy, clients may wish to consider whether the provider is offering evidenced-based treatment, whether they have strong rapport with their therapist, and whether they have agreed-upon goals: all of these factors may impact the effectiveness of treatment. Clients may discuss concerns with their provider if they aren't making progress or consider switching providers if they aren't making improvements in a few months.

## **PSYCHIATRIST (MD)**

A psychiatrist is a medical doctor with special training in mental health and psychiatric care. They generally view and treat mental illness from an organic, medical perspective. They have training in diagnosis and often focus on medication and medication management to address mental health concerns. Some may do psychotherapy or collaborate with another provider who does.

## **PSYCHOLOGIST (PHD OR PSYD)**

A psychologist is a professional who has a doctorate degree (PhD or PsyD) in psychology, a science that deals with thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Psychologists have specific training in mental health, diagnosis, psychological assessment, a wide variety of psychotherapies, research, and more. They have had many years of supervised training (often up to 3,000 hours of supervised experience before licensure) in practical applications of these skills. They generally do not prescribe medication (there are a few states in which this may be an exception) and will use psychotherapy to address concerns. They may work with another provider who can prescribe medication if needed.

### **PSYCHIATRIC NURSE (MSN OR DNP OR PMHNP)**

You'll see different letters here. Generally, the first letters listed are highest degree earned (master's, doctorate, etc.), then licensure, then state requirements, and then national certifications: MSN – master's of science in nursing, DNP – doctor of nursing practice, or DNSc – doctor of nursing science.

A psychiatric nurse is a nurse practitioner who has specialized training in psychiatric care and mental health issues. They vary in the services they can offer, depending on their education and training and state laws. They may prescribe medication and focus on medication management using a holistic health approach. Psychiatric/mental health nurse practitioners (PMHNP) have a four-year college degree in nursing (BSN) and also complete an approved master of science in nursing (MSN) or doctor of nursing practice (DNP). PMHNPs are licensed by individual states and in some states are required to practice under the supervision of a psychiatrist. PMHNPs provide a wide range of services to adults, children, adolescents, and their families, including assessment and diagnosis, prescribing medications, and providing therapy for individuals with psychiatric disorders or substance abuse problems.

### **CLINICAL SOCIAL WORKERS (LCSW)**

Typically, a clinical social worker will have completed a master's degree in social work (MSW) and carry the LCSW designation if they are doing psychotherapy (Licensed Counselor of Social Work; Licensed Clinical Social Worker).

### **MARRIAGE & FAMILY THERAPIST (MFT)**

These therapists tend to have a master's degree (but this varies depending on the state and whether they live in California, where a master's degree is not required) and typically have hundreds to thousands of hours of direct clinical experience. Because this designation varies from state to state, the professional training and qualifications may also vary significantly.

### **LICENSED PROFESSIONAL COUNSELOR (LPC)**

The requirements for this designation, which can be in addition to the professional's educational degree, vary from state to state. Most are master's level professionals who provide psychotherapy.