

**HEALTHY MINDS**  
**A WEEKLY COLUMN ALL ABOUT MENTAL WELLNESS**  
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**Mental Health Professionals**



When I was a young man I wanted to become a psychiatrist, which is a medical doctor that specializes in disorders of the mind. I finished my pre-med at college and went on to complete two years at a medical school in Belgium, in the French language. I was distracted by the sights, sounds, and flavors of living in Europe and wound up resigning from the school and going on to study sociology, and later music production. Many years later I learned about Mental Health Counseling and completed the master's program, licensure and national certification exams. Now that I understand how the various mental health professions have evolved and changed, I find myself fortunate to have been led to this profession, in terms of my preferred choice to mental health. Let me elucidate!

The goal of mental health professionals is to improve the mental health of individuals, couples, and families, by a variety of techniques, sometimes by improving relationships and other times by treating specific mental disorders. Sometimes various mental health practitioners work together to use their specific area of expertise or even cultural or religious background to assist a particular patient/client. Psychiatric medication is usually used by psychiatrists, but in some areas they can be prescribed by clinical psychologists or psychiatric nurses as well. Shock therapy and psychosurgery can only be used by psychiatrists (sometimes effectively and other times with disastrous consequences). Fortunately, the "ice-pick lobotomy" is no longer practiced.

Psychotherapy is used by most practitioners, in varying degrees and with various expertise and effectiveness. It is sometimes called "talk-therapy" and is an interpersonal intervention helping clients to live and function successfully by increasing their sense of well-being and reducing their mental discomfort. Techniques include dialogue, communication, and the encouraging of behavior change. There are many schools or approaches to psychotherapy, and I shall begin to discuss them an upcoming edition of Healthy Minds.

Let me define and differentiate some of the practitioners of psychotherapy.

The **CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST** is a regulated professional that addresses moderate to severe or chronic psychological problems, including mental disorders that are diagnosable. These individuals, besides doing research, psychological assessment and testing, teaching, consulting, and testifying as expert witnesses, also practice psychotherapy, and can work with individuals, families or groups.

The **MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELOR**, also known as a Counseling Psychologist, a Counselor, or a Psychotherapist, is also a regulated professional that addresses normal or

moderate psychological problems such as anxiety or mild depression, marital problems, sexual dysfunction, anger management, addiction problems (including psychological eating problems or smoking cessation), or coping with disasters. Counselors, however may work with more serious problems as well and also work with individuals, families and groups. Like clinical psychologists they may make diagnoses, and offer treatment plans and therapy, and follow through on client care. The differences between these two professions are becoming more blurred.

The SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST, another regulated professional is concerned with the social, emotional and academic performance and well-being of the student within the institution of education, and has more training in child development, the psychology of learning, child behavior, and education in general, and works with school administrators and teachers to provide assessment and prevention of problems.

The SOCIAL WORKER, another regulated professional, often designated as clinical social workers assist clients with mental health issues and may assess and treat them, provide case management, advocate for their legal rights, and can work for agencies or independently and often work in conjunction with other health care professionals.

The PSYCHIATRIC NURSE or Mental Health Nurse or Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner work with a large variety of mental health problems, often in primary care facilities, outpatient mental health clinics, and in hospitals. They work with psychiatric disorders, medical mental health conditions, and provide emergency psychiatric services, create treatment plans, and manage the care of their clients, and can diagnose and in some states dispense and prescribe medications.

The PSYCHIATRIST is the one profession here that requires an MD or OD degree and license, certifying them to treat mental illness and allowing them to use medications. Next week we shall look at the role of the psychiatrist and the disturbing trend of the decline of psychotherapy and increase of pharmaceutical therapy in this profession.

**TIP OF THE WEEK:** Want to feel better? Need a little extra spending cash? Are you tough enough for the challenge? OK then! STOP SMOKING! STOP SMOKING RIGHT NOW! STOP! STOP!!!!!!!