

THE ALPHABET SOUP OF MENTAL HEALTH

BY

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THINGS HAVE COME A LONG WAY IN THE MENTAL HEALTH FIELD SINCE THE DAYS OF ARISTOTLE, ST. AUGUSTINE, PHILLIPE PINEL, RENÉ DESCARTES, WILLIAMS JAMES, G. STANLEY HALL, JOHN B. WATSON, AND SIGMUND FREUD. FROM A PROFESSION THAT COMES OUT OF AN UNUSUAL MIXTURE OF PHILOSOPHY, RELIGION, AND SCIENCE, THE FIELD OF MENTAL HEALTH HAS “COME INTO ITS OWN” AS A SEPARATE, RESPECTABLE DISCIPLINE ONLY FAIRLY RECENTLY. THIS TREND GAINED CONSIDERABLE MOMENTUM IN THE 70’S AND 80’S, WHEN IT BECAME MORE “ACCEPTABLE” FOR A SO-CALLED “NORMAL” INDIVIDUAL TO ADMIT TO PSYCHOLOGICAL DIFFICULTIES AND SEEK HELP FOR THESE ISSUES. AS WE HAVE PASSED INTO THE DECADE OF THE 90’S AND INTO THE NEW MILLENNIUM, WITH INCREASED PUBLIC EDUCATION AND AWARENESS OF THE ETIOLOGY AND TREATMENT OF EMOTIONAL DISORDERS, IT HAS BECOME “FASHIONABLE” AND CERTAINLY PRUDENT TO SEEK ASSISTANCE WHEN ONE FEELS THE NEED.

WITH THE INCREASE IN PUBLIC UTILITIES OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES, THE PLETHORA AND DIVERSITY OF MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDERS OF THESE SERVICES HAVE ALSO INCREASED. WHAT WAS ONCE A FIELD LEFT ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY TO PSYCHIATRISTS AND PSYCHOLOGISTS IN THE EARLY YEARS, THE MENTAL HEALTH FIELD OF HAS EXPANDED TO INCLUDE SOCIAL WORKERS, PROFESSIONAL COUNSELORS, PASTORAL COUNSELORS, MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPISTS, CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY SPECIALISTS, ETC. TO MAKE MATTERS EVEN MORE CONFUSING TO THE GENERAL LAY PUBLIC, EACH OF THESE VARIETIES OF MENTAL HEALTH WORKERS HAS ITS OWN “ALPHABET SOUP” OF ACCOMPANYING PREFIXES AND SUFFIXES. THESE INCLUDE SUCH TITLES AS DR., M.D., PSY.D., PH.D., ED.D., M.S.W., L.I.S.W., N.C.A.C., M.ED., M.S., A.B.P.P., AD NAUSEAM.

AS BOTH A PRACTITIONER AND AN EDUCATOR, PERHAPS THE MOST

COMMONLY ASKED QUESTION I RECEIVE FROM PATIENTS AND STUDENTS ALIKE IS "WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE"? QUICKLY FOLLOWING THIS IS ANOTHER INTERROGATIVE IN THE FORM OF "O.K., SO WHICH ONE SHOULD I GO TO"? IN ORDER TO HELP ELUCIDATE THESE ISSUES, THIS ARTICLE WILL PROVIDE A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE TRAINING REQUIRED AND SOME OF THE MORE USUAL SERVICES PERFORMED BY TWO OF THE MOST COMMONLY CONFUSED FORMS OF MENTAL HEALTH PRACTITIONERS PROVIDING DIRECT THERAPEUTIC AND/OR DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES TO THE PUBLIC...PSYCHIATRISTS AND PSYCHOLOGISTS.

PSYCHIATRISTS ARE INDIVIDUALS POSSESSING A DOCTOR OF MEDICINE (M.D.) DEGREE WHO HAVE GONE THROUGH A 4-YEAR UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE, 4 YEARS OF MEDICAL SCHOOL, A YEAR OF INTERNSHIP (SOMETIMES, THIS IS OPTIONAL), AND AN AVERAGE OF 4 YEARS OF RESIDENCY TRAINING IN PSYCHIATRY. EXTRA YEARS OF RESIDENCY TRAINING ARE USUALLY ADDED, SHOULD THE PHYSICIAN CHOOSE TO SPECIALIZE IN PEDIATRIC PSYCHIATRY. IN MEDICAL SCHOOL, THESE PERSONS ARE TRAINED EXACTLY AS OTHER PHYSICIANS ARE TRAINED, WITH MOST OF THEIR SPECIALTY TRAINING BEING DONE AT THE RESIDENCY LEVEL VIA SEMINARS AND "OJT". IN ADDITION, SOME PSYCHIATRISTS PURSUE POST-DOCTORAL CERTIFICATIONS IN SPECIALTY AREAS, SUCH AS PSYCHOANALYSIS THROUGH A VARIETY OF SANCTIONED INSTITUTES. THESE MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS USUALLY PERFORM ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING DUTIES: (1) MEDICATION MANAGEMENT OF DISORDERS REQUIRING PSYCHOPHARMACOLOGICAL TREATMENT ("DRUG THERAPY"); (2) RESEARCH IN THEIR RESPECTIVE INTEREST AREAS, SUCH AS NEUROLOGICAL DISORDERS; (3) TEACHING EITHER IN HOSPITALS OR UNIVERSITY SETTINGS; (4) WRITING FOR PROFESSIONAL PUBLICATIONS; OR (5) PERFORMING PSYCHOTHERAPY (TRADITIONALLY IN IN-PATIENT SETTINGS, ALTHOUGH THIS HAS BROADENED INTO THE OUT-PATIENT ARENA OVER THE YEARS). ONLY PSYCHIATRISTS ATTENDING ACCREDITED RESIDENCY TRAINING INSTITUTIONS ARE ELIGIBLE FOR LICENSURE AS SUCH. TRADITIONALLY, PSYCHIATRISTS WHO HAVE TREATED PATIENTS THROUGH

EITHER MEDICATION OR "TALK THERAPY" HAVE SEEN MORE SERIOUSLY AND CHRONICALLY DISTURBED INDIVIDUALS, ALTHOUGH THIS TREND HAS ALSO CHANGED SOMEWHAT IN MORE RECENT YEARS. ACCORDING TO DR. WININGER, A PSYCHIATRIST WHO WAS FORMALLY OPERATING OUT OF TENNESSEE WHO ALSO TAUGHT CLASSES AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL, THE REAL STRENGTH OF PSYCHIATRY RESIDES ITS MEDICALLY BASED TRAINING THAT GIVES PSYCHIATRISTS AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE VARIOUS ROLES THAT PHYSIOLOGICAL PROCESSES PLAY IN THE MENTAL LIFE OF INDIVIDUALS.

PSYCHOLOGISTS ARE PERSONS WHO HAVE OBTAINED A DOCTORATE DEGREE IN PHILOSOPHY (PH.D.), EDUCATION (ED.D.), OR PSYCHOLOGY (PSY.D.) AT THE GRADUATE LEVEL AND HAVE GONE THROUGH A YEARLONG INTERNSHIP TYPICALLY CONSISTING OF 2,000 HOURS OF SERVICE. THIS IS PRECEDED BY A 4-YEAR BACHELOR'S DEGREE (USUALLY IN A RELATED FIELD) AND ALMOST ALWAYS A 2 - 3 YEAR MASTER'S DEGREE IN EITHER PSYCHOLOGY (USUALLY IN EITHER CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY OR GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY) OR EDUCATION (USUALLY IN COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY, SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY, EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY, OR COUNSELING/GUIDANCE). GRADUATE SCHOOLS AWARDING THE DOCTORAL DEGREE VARY IN THEIR LENGTH OF TRAINING FROM BETWEEN FOUR TO EIGHT YEARS. AFTERWARDS, SOME PSYCHOLOGISTS THEN OPT FOR MORE INTENSIFIED TRAINING IN SPECIALTY AREAS BY ATTAINING A POST-DOCTORAL CERTIFICATION THROUGH SOME FORMAL TRAINING EXPERIENCE. SINCE THEY ARE NOT GRADUATES OF MEDICAL SCHOOL, PSYCHOLOGISTS ARE NOT ALLOWED TO PERFORM THE DUTIES OF A PHYSICIAN (I.E., PRESCRIBE MEDICATION). THIS HAS CHANGED IN SOME STATES IN RECENT YEARS, SINCE THERE IS A GROWING MOVEMENT TO ALLOW CERTAIN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGISTS WITH PROPER BACHELOR'S, MASTER'S, DOCTORAL, INTERNSHIP, AND POST-DOCTORAL TRAINING TO BE ABLE TO HAVE LIMITED PRESCRIPTION PRIVILEGES FOR PSYCHOTROPIC DRUGS USED TO TREAT VARIOUS PSYCHOLOGICAL CONDITIONS (E.G., DEPRESSION, ANXIETY, ATTENTION-DEFICIT/HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER, BIPOLAR DISORDER, SCHIZOPHRENIA). FURTHER,

ONLY CERTAIN SUBAREAS WITHIN THE OVERALL FIELD OF PSYCHOLOGY (I.E., CLINICAL, COUNSELING, AND SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY) ARE USUALLY "LICENSABLE" TO SEE PATIENTS FOR INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOTHERAPY AND RECEIVE THIRD-PARTY PAYMENT (I.E., TAKE INSURANCE). WITHIN THESE AREAS, ONLY DOCTORAL-LEVEL INDIVIDUALS GRADUATING FROM ACCREDITED SCHOOLS MAY BECOME LICENSED, THUS EARNING THE PRIVILEGE TO USE THE TITLE OF AND PRACTICE AS A "PSYCHOLOGIST". THESE MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS USUALLY PERFORM ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING DUTIES: (1) PSYCHOLOGICAL AND/OR PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL TESTING TO DETERMINE THE NATURE, EXTENT, AND TYPE OF DISORDER; (2) PERFORMING PSYCHOTHERAPY IN A VARIETY OF PRIVATE, HOSPITAL, COLLEGE, OR COMMUNITY SETTINGS; (3) TEACHING EITHER IN UNIVERSITY SETTINGS OR HOSPITALS; (4) RESEARCH IN AN INTEREST AREA, SUCH AS CONDUCT DISORDERS WITH ADOLESCENTS; OR (5) WRITING FOR PROFESSIONAL PUBLICATIONS. DEPENDING ON THEIR TRAINING AND AREAS OF SPECIALTY, PSYCHOLOGISTS OFTEN TREAT PERSONS FROM A WIDE RANGE OF THE GENERAL POPULATION. ACCORDING TO DR. STEVENS, A PSYCHOLOGIST FORMERLY OPERATING IN THE OHIO AREA, PSYCHOLOGY'S STRENGTH LIES IN ITS THOROUGH UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN BEHAVIOR THROUGH THE EFFICACIOUS USE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT AND THEORIES OF PERSONALITY.

OBVIOUSLY, THE BEST PROFESSIONAL TO APPROACH FOR HELP WILL VARY ACCORDING TO AN INDIVIDUAL'S NEEDS AND PREFERENCES. THOSE WITH MORE CHRONIC, BIOLOGICALLY BASED DISORDERS THAT WILL LIKELY REQUIRE SOME FORM OF MEDICATION MANAGEMENT MIGHT DO WELL TO CONSULT WITH A PSYCHIATRIST. INDIVIDUALS REQUIRING EMOTIONAL AND/OR INTELLECTUAL ASSESSMENT WOULD BE BEST ADVISED TO SEEK OUT A PSYCHOLOGIST, SINCE THEY ARE INTENSIVELY TRAINED IN THESE AREAS AND, IN MOST STATES, ARE THE ONLY MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS LICENSED TO PERFORM THIS TYPE OF TESTING. IN STILL OTHER INSTANCES, IT IS ADVISABLE TO USE A "TEAM APPROACH" (I.E., GETTING THE PATIENT TO USE THE SERVICES OF MULTIPLE MENTAL AND/OR

MEDICAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS) FOR MAXIMAL BENEFIT.

ULTIMATELY, THE MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL WHOM YOU CHOSE TO SEE SHOULD BE SOMEONE WHO BEST SUITS YOUR NEEDS, PERSONALITY, AND LIFESTYLE. WHOMEVER YOU SELECT, BE AN INFORMED CONSUMER OF SERVICES BEFORE COMMITTING TO TREATMENT. THIS CAN BE DONE BY PHONE WHEN YOU CALL TO INQUIRE ABOUT SERVICES FROM THE CLINICIAN'S OFFICE AND/OR VISITING THE PROSPECTIVE CLINICIAN'S WEBSITE (SINCE MOST NOW HAVE ONE). IN ADDITION TO SUCH THINGS AS FEES, THIRD-PARTY-PAYERS ACCEPTED, HOURS OF OPERATION, AND MISCELLANEOUS OTHER "HOUSEKEEPING" QUESTIONS (I.E., LOCATION), BE CERTAIN TO ASK ABOUT SUCH ITEMS AS THE FOLLOWING: (A) DEGREES AND/OR CERTIFICATIONS, (B) AREAS OF LICENSURE OR CERTIFICATION, (C) ADDITIONAL BOARD CERTIFICATIONS AND/OR DIPLOMATES, (D) SPECIALTY TREATMENT AREAS AND/OR POPULATIONS, (E) THERAPEUTIC THEORETICAL ORIENTATION, (F) MEMBERSHIP IN LOCAL, STATE, AND/OR NATIONAL PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, AND (G) YEARS IN PRACTICE.