

What is a Psychiatrist, Psychologist, Marriage and Family Therapist, Licensed Clinical Social Worker, and Licensed Professional Counselor?

Psychiatrist, Psychologist, PhD, LCSWs, MFTs, LPCs, they are all head doctors, right? What do all of the initials mean? Which one should I go to? Many people, even relatively sophisticated individuals often aren't sure what distinguishes one from another.

Psychiatrist – (MD or DO) Psychiatrists are doctors who have graduated from a medical school and practice the branch of medicine involved with the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of mental and emotional disorders. Most physicians, regardless of specialty, go through more or less identical training in medical school and postgraduate internship, then specialize during a period of advanced training called a residency. A psychiatric residency is usually a three year program.

Because their primary training is medical, very few psychiatrists undergo in –depth, specialized preparation in psychosocial (counseling) treatments and those who do are usually trained in psychodynamic methods. Therefore, the first line of treatment for most psychiatrists will be to prescribe medication.

Psychologist (PhD, PsyD, or EdD) Psychologists have had a least one year of post doctoral internship experience in a clinical setting, and like physicians, are licensed to practice under Arizona state laws. Clinical psychologists are trained in the art and science of applied psychology – the study of human thought, emotion, behavior and relationships. They are trained to diagnosis, assessment, do psychological testing, use research methodology and non medical-psychosocial therapies and treatment methods. While in most settings they are not permitted to prescribe medication, psychologists have been trained recently in psychopharmacology and are prepared to work closely with psychiatrists and other medical practitioners when medication is necessary.

Marriage and Family Therapist (MFT) Therapist can be either a master level clinician or a doctoral level clinician licensed in the State of Arizona. An MFT has been trained in the behavioral, interpersonal and developmental problems specific to intimate relations like families experience. They are typically trained in clinical and interviewing skills, diagnosis, assessment, relationship dynamics, emotional issues, addictions, psychological, and behavioral intervention. Many MFT programs teach medical pharmacology, but MFT practitioners are not licensed to prescribe medication, however they will work with physicians who can prescribe medications.

Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) Master level social work clinician who has spent a minimum of two years in post graduate in supervised clinical practice, and is licensed in the State of Arizona. LCSWs' treatment modality is to assess, identify, diagnose, and treat an individual within the context of their social framework and attempt to account for circumstances that impact their experience. Their training in relation to pharmacology is limited, but like psychologists are prepared to work closely with medical practitioners when medication is necessary.

Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) This is a master level licensed clinician, who has completed a counseling focused program and in the state of Arizona can apply for a counseling license. LPCs are often trained to assess, diagnose and treat the practical formulation of behavioral, interpersonal, and developmental issues that people face. Like other master level clinicians they are not able to prescribe medication, but will work with doctors who can.

All licensed behavioral sciences professionals must have a mandated amount of continuing education for every licensing cycle (typically one to three years). As a result each counselor is required to attend trainings, conferences, education classes, and practicums. The end result is a competent, up-to-date, currently-trained, useful professional that will meet your needs!