

Roles of Mental Health Professionals

You will receive treatment and support from professionals with a variety of titles when you use mental health services. The following provides you with a very brief overview of the roles and responsibilities of the people who may be available to work with you in your recovery. Some of these professionals are found in hospital and in community settings.

All of the following professionals will work with the individual and family to help develop skills and strategies to manage thoughts, emotions and behaviours that impact on one's mental illness. Their goal is to promote the independence of individual's in areas of self-care, productivity and leisure.

Medical Doctor / Family Doctor / General Practitioner (GP)

Ensures you receive thorough physical and mental/cognitive assessments and ongoing medical management. May refer you for specialist consultations and treatment when necessary. Assists you in addressing preventative health needs. The GP acts as the gatekeeper to accessing specialized care and treatment. They are central to managing your total health picture.

Psychiatrist

A medical doctor who specializes in mental health and mental illness. This includes diagnosis and prescribing and monitoring medications. As a member of your team, he or she is also involved in your treatment and care plan. Some psychiatrists will do therapeutic counselling.

Psychologist

Has knowledge of developmental processes; mental health problems, disorders and needs; assessment, testing and test interpretation; therapeutic and behavioral management approaches to treatment; and provision of therapy, counselling and consultation. Will work with you to develop skills and strategies to manage thoughts, emotions and behaviours that impact on your mental health. Can be involved in helping you learn about yourself to aid your recovery.

Case Manager/Mental Health Worker

A general title for the professional from the mental health system designated to help coordinate your recovery. Will help you access treatment, counselling, housing, social, vocational, and income supports. May have a background as a social worker or nurse.

Nurse

(includes Registered Nurse (RN), Registered Psychiatric Nurse (RPN), Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN))

As part of the therapeutic team in the hospital, ensures treatment and/or medication prescribed by your Psychiatrist and/or Medical Doctor is administered and that your progress is monitored and recorded. Will help to provide support when needed.

Social Worker

(Includes Mental Health Social Worker, Community Liaison – Psychiatric Social Worker, Concurrent Disorders Social Worker)

Has knowledge of family and social history; family functioning and specific areas of social work. (e.g., addictions, adoption, abuse, community living services, mental health). In a hospital, a social worker may coordinate the discharge planning process. Once you leave the hospital other community social workers may coordinate your recovery support to ensure you get the resources you need. May help you find solutions to problems you encounter in daily living.

Pharmacist

Has knowledge of the outcomes and side effects of medications, their interactions and reactions, and what substances and foods to avoid with the medication you are taking. The Pharmacy can provide a great deal of written information to the public.

Alcohol and Drug Counsellor

Has knowledge of symptoms and effects of alcohol and drug use, therapeutic approaches and counselling to support your recovery. May refer you to various services of the addictions' system of care - such as a residential treatment facility.

Counsellor

Has knowledge of counselling approaches. Provides advice and counselling on behavioural management, development of skills and strategies to manage the thoughts, emotions and behaviours that impact on your mental health. Can become involved in helping you learn about yourself to aid your recovery.

Occupational Therapist

Has knowledge of activity analysis and promotion of self-care, productivity (work, school, volunteering) and leisure. Assists you in the enhancement of community living skills, including employment skills, social skills and appropriate behaviour. Works with individuals to enable them to pursue occupations and activities that they want or need to do. May include teaching skills, providing education and finding resources to do this.

Advocate

Speaks or acts on behalf of an individual to ensure concerns they may have about the service they are receiving are addressed. In some communities, paid, formal advocate

positions have been created. Each community has access to a Patient Representative who will help deal with concerns about the health care you or a family member receives.

Selecting a Therapist or Counsellor

These are some things you might wish to think about when selecting a therapist or counsellor. In most communities, you will have a choice about who you can go see. Think about the following when entering a therapeutic relationship with someone. Do they demonstrate:

- Understanding and empathy
- Ability to listen without judgment
- Extensive knowledge of the illness
- Availability, with someone else on call as needed
- Willingness to try alternative therapies, including those that are minimally invasive
- Encourages personal choices
- Skill at giving genuine support, counsel and advice
- Affordable rates and /or willingness to work with insurance plans

You should also consider your preferences around the age and gender of the therapist you choose.

How to find a Therapist or Counsellor

- Recommendations from other people who have received mental health services
- Referral from your family Doctor or Psychiatrist
- Recommendations from other mental health organizations
- Recommendation from Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or Extended Health Program
- Yellow Pages

Before making a plan with a Counsellor or Therapist to begin a series of sessions, ask if you can visit free for one time to see if you both feel comfortable working together. Many therapists find that they must charge even for the initial consultation - make sure you settle this beforehand. You may have to visit with several counsellors before you find one that best meets your needs.