



Definitions of Titles for Mental Health Professionals:

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) recognizes six areas of independent professional practice for the diagnosis and treatment of Mental Health issues. While NAMI's recognition of professional Mental Health Practitioners may not be exhaustive, it is perhaps the most concise and descriptive of Mental Health services provided by different disciplines.

We believe it is helpful for churches to be aware of the education and primary purposes of each type of mental health professional in order to effectively care for the people within the Body of Christ.

Psychiatrist – Psychiatrists are physicians with either a doctor of medicine (M.D.) degree or doctor of osteopathy (D.O.) degree, who also has at least four additional years of specialized study and training in psychiatry. Psychiatrists are licensed as physicians to practice medicine by individual states. "Board Certified" psychiatrists have passed the national examination administered by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology. Psychiatrists provide medical and psychiatric evaluations, treat psychiatric disorders, provide psychotherapy (in some cases) and prescribe and monitor medications. There are several subspecialty boards in psychiatry including child and adolescent, forensic, and addictions.

Psychologist – Psychologists have a doctoral degree (Ph.D., Psy.D.) in clinical, counseling, or Health Psychology/Behavioral Medicine. Psychologists are also licensed by individual states to practice psychology, and in many states, are licensed as Health Service Providers. They can provide psychological testing, diagnostic evaluations, treat emotional and behavioral problems and mental disorders, and provide a variety of psychotherapeutic techniques. Psychologists usually attend a four or five year graduate program with a year of internship followed by a one year postdoctoral period of supervision prior to licensure. There is also a National Board/Council of Health Service Providers in Psychology that requires psychologists to provide two years of documented supervision post-licensure in particular areas of specialty.

Social Worker – Social workers have either a bachelor's degree (B.A., B.S. or B.S.W.), a master's degree (M.A., M.S., M.S.W. or M.S.S.W), or doctoral degree (D.S.W. or Ph.D.). In most states, social workers take an examination to be licensed to practice social work (L.C.S.W. or L.I.C.S.W.), and the type of license depends on their level of education and practice experience. Social workers provide a range of services based on their level of training and certification. Typically a bachelor's level social worker provides case management, inpatient discharge planning services, placement services and a variety of other daily living needs services for individuals. Master's level social workers can provide this level of services but are also able to provide assessment and treatment of psychiatric illnesses including psychotherapy.

Licensed Professional Counselors – Licensed professional counselors have a master's degree (M.A. or M.S.) in psychology, counseling or other mental health related fields (some may hold doctorates) and typically have two years of supervised post-graduate experience. They may provide services that include assessment and diagnosis of mental health conditions as well as providing individual, family or group therapy. They are licensed by individual states and may also be certified by the National Board of Certified Counselors.

Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT) – The American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy is a professional association of therapists who conduct marriage and family therapy. A graduate degree (M.A. or M.S.) plus post graduate supervision by an approved supervisor is required for licensure (some may hold doctorates). LMFT's are licensed by individual states.

Many individuals choose to seek pastoral counseling from the local church or a parachurch ministry. Individuals in these ministry settings may or may not carry the credentials listed above. It is important for you to know the credentials your counselor does or does not carry and the implications this may have for the care you receive.

For a better understanding of the difference between pastoral and clinical counseling, please see the relevant post at www.summitrdu.com/counselng/FAQ.