

## Medical Psychology

**Definition:** Medical Psychology is a specialty trained at the post doctoral level and designed to deliver advanced diagnostic and clinical interventions in Medical and Healthcare Facilities utilizing the knowledge and skills of clinical psychology, health psychology, behavioral medicine, psychopharmacology and basic medical science.

Medical psychology is a very broad field and has been defined in various ways. The Academy of Medical Psychology's definition applies to both the practices of consultation and prescribing in Medical Psychology. These professionals are trained in a specialty of psychology concerned with the application of psychological principles to the practice of medicine and both physical, as well as, mental disorders. They apply psychological theories, scientific psychological findings, and techniques of psychotherapy, behavior modification, cognitive, interpersonal, family, and life-style therapy to improve the psychological and physical health of the patient. Clinical psychologists with post doctoral specialty training as medical psychologists are the practitioners with refined skills in clinical observation in of the field of psychology, learning, central nervous system adaptation and change, and adaptation and lifestyle change applying a number of different methods in several different mediums of treatment. These highly qualified and post graduate specialized doctors are trained for service in primary care centers, hospitals, residential care centers, and long-term care facilities and in multidisciplinary collaboration and team treatment. They are trained and equipped to modify physical disease states and the actual cytoarchitecture and functioning of the central nervous and related systems using psychological and pharmacological techniques, and to provide prevention for the progression of disease having to do with poor personal and life-style choices and conceptualization, behavioral patterns, and chronic exposure to the effects of negative thinking, choosing, attitudes, and negative contexts.

Medical psychologists are trained to act as primary care coordinating and attending doctors in healthcare facilities. They have provided independent practice, diagnosis, and coordination of medical and psychological services in facilities for the last twenty years. The Medical Psychologist's training is informed by science, but is more focused on mastery of clinical diagnosis and techniques and placements, rotations, residencies, and internships in healthcare facilities and settings. Medical psychologists arrange for medical, dental, podiatric, nursing, educational, nutritional, speech and audiological, and other healthcare services as indicated by their diagnostic screening and assessment, and like other doctors operating in the healthcare arena are equipped to screen patients for the need for referral to other specialists and diagnostic and laboratory procedures that they may need. They provide case management and active communication with members of multidisciplinary intervention teams, and coordination of the medical psychology and psychopharmacology aspects of the patient's treatment plan.

The Academy of Medical Psychology requires that a board certified medical psychologist must hold doctoral degrees, which usually require 5 to 7 years of post-secondary education, and have an additional two to three years of graduate or advanced education and preceptorship/internship and are required to pass a recognized national examination.

Board certified specialists in Medical Psychology are qualified for positions as supervisor of other medical psychologists, medical psychology services and programs, director of psychology positions in primary care centers, hospitals, residential care centers, and long-term care facilities, and for senior and core faculty positions at university and college educational institutions and continuing education programs offering tracks, specialization, or degrees in Medical Psychology.

While they are trained and practice clinical psychopharmacology, psychopharmacology training and expertise is only a small portion of what makes a specialist a Medical Psychologist. Board Certified Medical Psychologists are qualified to provide psychopharmacology interventions (consulting or prescribing depending on state laws and rules for practice and the preferences of the doctor). Many are prescribing in approved states, all branches of the military, the Indian Health Service, and other entities allowing psychology prescription and consultation and patient monitoring. The vast majority of Medical Psychologists are practicing the psychopharmacological sub component of medical psychology at the consulting level in which they use their clinical and diagnostic skills, behavioral specialist skills, health and rehabilitation psychology skills, basic medical sciences training, and their psychopharmacology skills to evaluate patients regarding their need for psychoactive medications, participate in collaboration with prescribers (physicians, advanced practice nurses, or prescribing psychologists) to select, apply, and monitor and evaluate medication techniques and interventions. Board Certified Medical Psychologists are qualified to serve as Directors of Internship and Residency Training Programs seeking to train post doctoral psychologists who are taking specialty training for practice in medical and integrated care facilities.

Medical Psychologists are recognized by Medicare, Medicaid, Insurance, and Managed Care Plans for reimbursement for healthcare services as independent diagnosticians and practitioners.

### **History and Background Information**

The specialty of medical psychology has established a specialty board certification, the *American Board of Medical Psychology* and the *Academy of Medical Psychology*. Both require a doctorate degree in psychology and extensive post doctoral training in the specialty and the passage of an oral or written examination. Medical psychologists are qualified to be members of the national practitioner association (*National Alliance of Professional Psychology Providers-NAPPP* <http://nappp.org>) and are trained to treat the behavioral and psychological aspects of physical disorders and to treat mental and the psychological aspects of physical disease in primary care centers, hospitals, and nursing homes. Qualified psychologists can also become board certified in Behavioral Health Practice by the *American Board of Behavioral Health Practice* (<http://abbhp.org>) further extending their behavioral health skill set and specialty and have their practices

accredited by the *National Institute of Behavioral Health Quality* (<http://nibhq.org>) demonstrating excellence in healthcare facility practice and participation. Clinical guidelines, various national examinations, and bibliographies and study materials have since been developed in multiple organizations supporting Medical Psychology training and practice. Continuing education programs for Medical Psychologists have been integrated into several professional associations serving psychologists, integrated continuing education programs for psychologists, physicians, and nurses, and in University and College Settings.

Medical Psychologists and prescribing psychologists (RxP Psychologists, not as broadly trained and examined as Medical Psychologists) are being actively recruited by all branches of the military, the criminal justice system, the Indian Health Services, and hospitals and primary care centers. Medical Psychologists are now employed by Government Agencies as Medicare/Medicaid reviewers and facility monitors and in various leadership and decision making positions.