

# Seeing a Psychiatrist

## What Is A Psychiatrist? What Can They Do For You?

- A medically trained doctor who specializes in mental health
- Able to prescribe medications for psychiatric and mental illnesses
- Trained to engage in psychotherapy
- Nurse Practitioners, Nurse Specialists, and Physician Assistants can also receive psychiatric certification to diagnose and treat psychiatric and mental illnesses

## How You Can Prepare:

- Have a list of symptoms you have been experiencing. Make sure you share all of these with the psychiatrist.
- Have a list of questions you have about your situation or treatment options. If they aren't addressed during the appointment, make sure to ask them before you leave.
- Bring a list of your current medications and any other medical information you think may be helpful (if you have had recent lab work done, be sure to bring a copy!)
- Ask a friend or family member to be with you at the appointment, if it will help calm your nerves. You can always ask them to step outside if things get too personal. They may be able to offer some different insight to your situation to the psychiatrist as well.
- Ask them to clarify and explain anything you are unclear about.
- Some specific questions to consider asking:
  - What is my diagnosis?
  - What are the treatment options?
  - How soon should treatment begin and how long will it last?
  - What are the risks and benefits of the treatment you are recommending? What are the specific side effects I should anticipate?
  - What happens if this treatment fails?
  - How will I know if the treatment is working or is not working?
  - How will this treatment effect my other medications or lifestyle/habits? (especially if drinker or smoker)

## What To Expect At Your First Visit:

- Lots of questions! Unlike a general practitioner, a psychiatrist will need to find out about other areas of your life aside from your medical history. They will ask you questions about:
  - Your medical history, including surgeries, illnesses, and current injuries or physical concerns
  - Your family's medical and mental illness history
  - Your mental health history. They may ask questions such as:
    - What brings you here today?
    - How long have you been experiencing this?
    - How does it affect your life?

- What have you done that has been helpful/not helpful? (make sure to tell them if seeing a therapist)
- Have you noticed any other changes in your emotions or behaviors?
- Have you ever seen a psychiatrist before?
- Your social history, including who you consider to be your support system and substance use history
- They will do a quick mental assessment, which includes asking more specific questions to test your memory, ability to concentrate, and intellect
- They may ask if you have a close friend or family member they could speak with as well who could give them more details about your situation
- They will likely take your blood pressure and weight
- They may order some lab work to be done, which would require your blood to be drawn
- They will talk to you about your situation, including discussing what they think is going on. They may give you a diagnosis, or they may not. They might recommend medication.
- They may offer psychotherapy through their practice. It is up to you if you wish to engage in therapy with them as well.
- They will likely schedule a follow-up visit to see how you are doing. Depending on the treatment plan you chose, this could be anywhere from 1 week to 3 months later.

Source: Michelle Kobdich