

Comparison of Phycologists and Psychiatrists

Matthew Cecka

Longwood University

In healthcare, specifically in therapy, the Psychiatrist and the Psychologist are two specialists with major similarities and overlap in their professions, despite crucial differences in their education requirements, responsibilities, qualifications, and career paths. The perceived overlap in these two professions stems from sociocultural characteristics associated with these professions as well as confusion over the specific roles each play and confusion over which specialist treats what conditions. While there are many similarities between these two healthcare professions, it is important to identify and understand the differences between Psychiatry and Psychology.

Psychiatry and Psychology both have high education requirements. To become a Psychologist, one must earn a PHD or a PsyD, which can take up to 6 years of graduate schooling. After obtaining a PHD or PsyD, one must complete a one or two-year internship. According to Allpsychologyschools.com, the purpose of the internship is to “expose students to methods of treatment, analytical testing, problem-solving techniques, psychological theory, and behavioral therapy.” (Directories 2018). After this internship, students must obtain a license by completing “one or two years of practical work experience supervised by an authorized mental health professional.” (Directories 2018). Generally, a practicing Psychologist has completed college, graduate school, a 2-year internship and has obtained a license through two years of closely supervised practice.

In contrast, a Psychiatrist is an MD doctor. They typically earn an MD through medical school, followed by four years of practice in-residence training. Psychiatrists then work “in the psychiatric unit of a hospital with a variety of patients, from children and adolescents with behavior disorders to adults with severe cases of mental illness.” (Directories 2018). This work

prepares them for the field they are entering, in the same way an internship prepares psychologists for their field. Generally, it takes more years of education and training to become a Psychologist than to become a Psychiatrist. They both require schooling beyond university, and both involve on the job training and internships.

In terms of job responsibilities roles, both Psychologists and Psychiatrists work directly with their patients and both work together to make up a patient's complete care team. Typically, patients see a Psychologist who then references them to a Psychiatrist. Psychologists work with their patients to evaluate their behavioral patterns, emotional state, and mental health. Then, after giving their patient a diagnosis, they will refer their patient to a Psychiatrist who can further develop the patients treatment plan, as well as prescribe them medications as part of that treatment plan. According to (Directories 2018), "The psychologist and psychiatrist work in tandem to treat patient symptoms from both a behavioral and clinical standpoint." They work together for the well being of the patient and are in continuous communication throughout the patients treatment.

As with all healthcare fields, there are underlying sociocultural characteristics associated with Psychiatry and Psychology. For example, the common belief is that the Psychiatrist is paid more since they hold an MD. This is actually quite accurate, as "In 2010, the average salary for a psychologist was \$68,640, whereas psychiatrists, under the blanket salary of physicians and surgeons, earned equal to or more than \$166,400 in 2010." (Degrees Nov 2019). Another common perception of the fields is driven by tv and movie culture. In tv shows and movies, the term "Therapist" is applied to both fields like a blanket, but in reality, Psychiatry and Psychology are vastly different in practice. Hollywood tends to depict both Psychiatrists and Psychologists as

therapists with couches patients lie on to pour their hearts out. In practice, however, Psychologists are the ones who typically work with patients' emotions, and usually, do much more than that in a variety of settings beyond a cozy room with a couch. Psychiatrists themselves seldom work with patients' emotions and mental state directly; rather they may work in pharmacies to create and prescribe medication. It is crucial to differentiate between the social understandings of these professions and their actual roles and job settings.

Psychologists typically work with patients from the beginning to assess their mental state. Psychiatrists work to treat patients' mental conditions and prescribe medication. But when does a patient seek care, and from which individual first? What leads a patient to seek care in the first place? Patients may see a regular physician who would recognize symptoms of mental health issues and refer them to a specialist such as a Psychologist. Patients may also recognize symptoms in themselves and seek the help of experts to further diagnose their ailments. As Web MD describes, "Psychologists look closely at your behavior" while "Psychiatrists have a stronger sense of biology and neurochemistry" (Rehagen 2018). If a patient has more emotional or behavioral symptoms, the patient would seek the services of a Psychologist. If the patient feels more physical, biological symptoms, the patient would seek the services of a Psychiatrist. There are many factors leading to the use of the services of a Psychiatrist or Psychologist, and these factors differ for each patient. Patients may see one or both of these professions, it depends on what factors caused them to seek care.

In conclusion, there are multiple key differences in Psychology and Psychiatry. These include differences in education, responsibilities, socio-cultural elements, and specializations. These differences can influence patients to seek the care of one versus the other. Despite these

crucial differences in professions, there are many areas of overlap, resulting in a close work relationship between Psychologists and Psychiatrists. Even with their differences, Psychologists and Psychiatrists communicate closely to ensure complete treatment of their patients. There are many differences and similarities in the fields of Psychology and Psychiatry that lead to differing roles played in the landscape of healthcare.

References

All Psychology Schools. (2019). Psychology vs. Psychiatry: Do You Know the Difference? Retrieved from <https://www.allpsychologyschools.com/psychology/psychology-vs-psychiatry/>

Best Counseling Degrees. (2019). WHICH IS BETTER – BECOMING A PSYCHOLOGIST OR A PSYCHIATRIST? Retrieved from <https://www.bestcounselingdegrees.net/faq/which-is-better-becoming-a-psychologist-or-a-psychiatrist/>

Rehagen, Tony. (2019). Psychologist vs Psychiatrist: Which is Right for You? Retrieved from [#1](https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/features/psychologist-or-psychiatrist-which-for-you)

Ryback, Ralph. (2016 Jan 04). Psychiatrist vs. Psychologist. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-truisms-wellness/201601/psychiatrist-vs-psychologist>