



## **What does a Psychiatrist do?**

Psychiatrists are trained medical doctors who are uniquely qualified to assess both the mental and physical aspects of emotional distress and mental illness. Their education has given them a full working knowledge of the many causes for patients' feelings and symptoms and they know which tests or evaluations are needed to make a complete, accurate diagnosis. With this understanding, psychiatrists can then recommend or prescribe treatment. They have a broad knowledge of the medications used to treat emotional distress and mental illness. A psychiatrist generally prescribes psychotropic medication and monitors how it affects your symptoms. Most psychiatrists do not provide therapy (time for you to talk in detail about your feelings, the problems you are experiencing, etc.) but may recommend that you also see a therapist **[see the information sheet "What does a Therapist do?"]**

### **Choosing a Psychiatrist:**

Check your health insurance to see if it covers the cost of treatment for emotional problems or mental illness. Most policies have limits on the number of visits, so you may also want to consider talking with your insurance agent or your employer's benefits representative about improving the coverage. Once you get through that process and are ready to choose a psychiatrist, make sure to mention any characteristics about the doctor that are important to you (for example; age, sex, race, religious background, etc.). Select two or three possibilities and call their phone numbers for information. First, ask if they are currently accepting new patients and then verify that they accept your insurance. Next you should ask about appointment availability, office location(s) and the cost of the first visit. When you are satisfied with this information, schedule an appointment.

### **The First Visit:**

Keep in mind that psychiatrists are busy, just like many other doctors, and you may have to wait. It's a good idea to bring something to read, to keep you occupied during your wait. Once you meet with the doctor, they will probably ask what kind of problems you're experiencing, what brought you to the office. They will also ask general questions about your background, family, habits and general health. They might want to know when you last had a complete physical examination and may want to see your medical records. They may even ask to talk with your family (general practice) doctor. This is to make sure that the symptoms you're experiencing are not caused by some physical problem. The psychiatrist will then summarize their findings and tells you what they think is the best form of treatment for you. It is important that you ask any questions you might

have during the first visit. Feel free to ask about fees, appointment flexibility, cancellation policy and insurance form processing.

After the first visit, think about how you felt about the psychiatrist. What was it like to talk with someone you've just met about your problems? Did they listen and seem to understand your feelings? Is this a person you feel you could trust? Did you like the location and office setting? If you didn't feel a connection with this psychiatrist, just pay for the visit and move on to the next psychiatrist on your list. When the chemistry does feel right, you've finished the first part of your work. The second part - working together with your psychiatrist to understand and overcome your problems - is about to begin.

**Compiled by Mental Health America of Northern Kentucky with information from the American Psychiatric Association.**