

## Forensic Psychiatry--What is the Difference Between Forensic and Clinical Psychiatry?

We have heard it all on those *CSI* or *NCIS* television shows, but what exactly is the role of a forensic psychiatrist and how does it differ from a clinical psychiatrist? In this article, we will explain briefly what a forensic psychiatrist does and note the aspects of this profession versus clinical psychiatry.

The objective of clinical psychiatry is to improve the patient's condition via a trusting relationship. Once a sense of trust is developed between the patient and the doctor, the patient opens up and tells the psychiatrist everything he needs to know in order to develop a proper treatment plan. This process is cooperative, and the psychiatrist keeps all his moral or value judgments to himself.

In contrast, forensic psychiatry is merely the antithesis of clinical psychiatry. This form of psychiatry is adversarial as opposed to cooperative. Here, moral and value judgments *are* made against the patient regarding his responsibility in a crime. The objective of forensic psychiatry is not to treat the patient but rather dissect the patient's personality to uncover his or her true motives. Simply put, the patient and the forensic psychiatrist are often in different corners of the ring.

In clinical psychiatry, the patient has no reason to lie since both the patient and the clinical psychiatrist want the patient's condition to improve. In forensic psychiatry, the patient has every reason to lie, cheat, or deceive with the intent of covering up the truth about their actions and thoughts. Patients of forensic psychiatrists will engage in this practice especially if they know they are guilty of a crime they are accused of committing. Forensic psychiatric patients want all possible motivations for committing a crime to be secret. They may feign or exaggerate symptoms to create an insanity defense. The forensic psychiatrist is most often considered an enemy unlike a clinical psychiatrist who is considered a friend.

Keep this in mind when you are watching *CSI*, *NCIS*, or any other type of similar program. You will know the difference between these two types of psychiatrists who are called to a witness stand to testify on behalf of the defense or the prosecution.

### About the Author

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