

## Alphabet Soup

by

Bradley T. Wajda, D.O.

In the past I have written about “How to Choose a Therapist”; however, I find many patients who are confused about the numerous different credentials of the professionals who hang out their shingle in order to provide mental health treatment. In fact, oftentimes people don’t even know the credentials of the person they are currently seeing for treatment. There are generally 2 types of mental health professional- those providing therapy and those providing medical treatment such as medications (only psychiatrists do both):

### Disciplines providing therapy

**Ph.D. in Psychology-** This is a graduate degree generally requiring 8 years of college following high school. The people granted this degree are “psychologists” and they perform both psychotherapy and psychological testing. It is a research oriented education. Unlicensed PhDs in psychology are called psychological assistants and must work under the supervision of a licensed psychologist.

**Psy.D. is a Doctor of Psychology-** This is essentially identical to a Ph.D. in Psychology except that the education is less research oriented and more practice oriented.

**LCSW stands for Licensed Clinical Social Worker-** This requires a clinically oriented Master’s degree. LCSWs provide psychotherapy but not psychological testing. While working toward licensure these folks are ASCWs or Associate Clinical Social Workers.

**LMFT stands for Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist-** This requires a clinically oriented Master’s degree. LMFTs provide psychotherapy but not psychological testing. While working toward licensure these folks are MFTIs or Marriage and Family Therapist Interns.

**LEP stands for Licensed Educational Psychologist-** This requires a minimum of a Master’s degree. LEPs provide both testing and psychological counseling pertaining to academic learning processes and the educational system.

**LPCC stands for Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor -** This requires a clinically oriented Master’s degree. LPCCs provide psychotherapy but not psychological testing. While working toward licensure these folks are PCCIs or Professional Clinical Counselor Interns.

**M.D. stands for Doctor of Medicine-** This represents an unlimited license to practice health care. MDs generally complete 4 years of college followed by 4 years of medical school and finally 4 years of specialty training in Psychiatry.

**D.O. stands for Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine-** This represents an unlimited license to practice health care. DOs generally complete 4 years of college followed by 4 years of medical school and finally 4 years of specialty training in Psychiatry. The difference between DOs and MDs is the philosophy that DOs view the patient as an integrated whole with an emphasis on prevention- though many MDs have adopted a similar view.

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### Disciplines providing medical treatment:

**PA stands for Physician's Assistant-** This generally requires a Master's Degree from a program associated with a medical school in which they are taught to practice medicine under the supervision of a physician.

**NP Stands for Nurse Practitioner-** This requires a Master's degree in Nursing and specialty training allowing them to practice medicine under the supervision of a physician.

**DOs and MDs** also fall into the medical treatment category. As psychiatrists, they represent the only discipline whose scope of practice (what they are allowed to do) is unlimited.

My motivation for addressing this issue of "what the titles mean" is to help the patient understand what was happening when they are seeing an MFTI under the supervision of an LMFT for psychotherapy while having their medications managed by a PA under the supervision of a psychiatrist (or any number of other combinations). The important issue is that you see qualified professionals that get results.