



Understanding Treatment Providers

There are many different professionals who work in or around the field of mental health. Each one has a different area of specialised knowledge and does something different. This information pack is designed to help you identify what kinds of professionals you would like to have involved in your journey towards improved mental health and wellbeing.

Below, you will find a list of the main professional groups working in the field and what they do. The list is in alphabetical order. If there is a professional group not included in this list who you would like to know more about, please contact our Information Manager at info@engagenz.co.nz.

This sheet was last updated on 11 June 2011. Check the Engage Aotearoa website for the latest updates and other useful resource sheets.

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Acupuncturist

Acupuncture is a traditional Chinese form of therapy that claims to relieve pain and promote health through the insertion and manipulation of needles to various points on the body (known as acupuncture points). Acupuncture is based on a belief that flowing through the body is a kind of “energy” called “chi”. An acupuncturist talks to a client to assess their presenting problems and uses needles to release or stimulate areas of the body thought to influence the ‘chi’ or energy involved in the problem. Acupuncture is based on tradition and authority, not on scientific method, so its evidence base is unknown and it is considered an alternative therapy.

Acupuncture was developed before the science of anatomy upon which modern biology is based, when all problems were viewed as imbalances or blockages of “chi”. The acupuncture points are located on what are claimed to be paths where the chi flows; these points were determined by a range of numerological calculations, but may relate to the points identified in modern reflexology where certain groups of nerve-endings connect to and influence a larger neural network.

While many have found acupuncture to be helpful in alleviating pain and psychological distress, many others have found it ineffective. While the scientific evidence for the effectiveness of acupuncture is weak, there is general consensus that acupuncture is safe when conducted by a well-trained practitioner, using sterile needles.

Clinical Psychologist

Psychology is the science of mind and behaviour. Clinical Psychologists have specifically studied mental disorder, what contributes to it and how it can be resolved. Clinical psychologists only use scientifically supported approaches to treatment and psychotherapy. Clinical psychologists often specialise in treating a particular type of mental disorder or a particular age-group and we recommend that you find a clinical psychologist who specialises in the area you need help with.

The New Zealand Psychologists Board says “Clinical Psychologists apply psychological knowledge and theory derived from research to the area of mental health and development, to assist children, young persons, adults and their families with emotional, mental, developmental or behavioural problems by using psychological assessment, formulation and diagnosis based on biological, social and psychological factors, and applying therapeutic interventions using a scientist-practitioner approach.”

A clinical psychologist often delivers talking therapy, but they are different from a psychotherapist, due to the scientific nature of their training and the inclusion of behavioural techniques. There is a list of registered clinical psychologists in New Zealand on the Board’s website at www.psychologistsboard.org.nz and a list of private practice clinical psychologists on the NZ College of Clinical Psychologists website: www.nzccp.co.nz/documents/private-practitioners

A clinical psychologist must have a doctorate degree in clinical psychology – this means that they have undertaken an undergraduate degree (BA or BSC), and a PHD in clinical psychology. They must also have undertaken 1500 hours of supervised, practical work with people experiencing mental disorder as part of their doctoral programme.

Consumer Advocate

A consumer advocate is a person who will speak up for you in a range of different situations where it can be difficult for a service-user to assert their opinions, preferences or needs. Consumer advocates can be of assistance if you have a complaint about a service or if you require a support person to attend appointments at a service that you find difficult to interact with such as Work and Income New Zealand. There are many organisations that offer advocacy services of different types and we recommend that you begin with the Human Rights Commission and then go from there: www.hrc.co.nz.

Consumer Advisor

Consumer advisors work for different mental-health services. They are people who have previously utilised the service themselves and who provide the service with a service-user perspective when hiring staff, setting guidelines, interacting with clientele and organising activities. If you have had a negative experience at a service, you can inform their Consumer Advisor so they can help the service to avoid this practice in future by making recommendations around how the service could better manage the situation. Consumer Advisors do not offer advocacy services. All District Health Boards employ a consumer advisor and many other services employ a consumer representative, which does much the same thing. A consumer advisor provides a link between service-user experience and service-provider practices.

Counsellor

A counsellor is a person who has been professionally trained to talk you through a variety of problems and to assist improved understanding and coping. There is no formal specified training for a counsellor but most have been trained in techniques to facilitate open discussion, the sharing of empathy and the exploration of alternative viewpoints. Counsellors tend to specialise in dealing with a certain type of problem or a certain age-group or demographic such as youth or women. They may utilise a range of techniques. They may or may not have studied mental disorder and the scientifically-supported approaches to its treatment. Some counsellors have trained in a specific form of psychotherapy such as cognitive behaviour therapy or transactional analysis; you will need to ask them what methods they use and what perspectives they work from.

Engage Aotearoa views counsellors as being an invaluable source of support and guidance and an excellent way of maintaining or starting progress towards your goals. Their services are typically cheaper than therapy with a psychotherapist, psychologist or psychiatrist.

Look for a counsellor who is a registered member of the New Zealand Association of Counsellors – this regulatory body ensures a minimum level of training and experience for practicing counsellors. In New Zealand all registered counsellors must have at least 500 hours of supervised counselling practise in addition to a counselling qualification to the equivalent of NZQA level 6, have participated in a counselling relationship themselves and have received supervision for at least one year. You can search for registered counsellors on the NZAC website at www.nzac.org.nz.

Counselling Psychologist

Psychology is the science of mind and behaviour.

Counselling psychologists have studied mental health enhancement and resilience promotion. The New Zealand Psychologists Board says “Counselling Psychologists apply psychological knowledge and theory derived from research to the area of client empowerment and enhancement, to assist children, young persons, adults and their families with personal, social, educational, and vocational

functioning by using psychological assessments and interventions, and preventative approaches that acknowledge ecological, developmental and phenomenological dimensions.”

Counselling Psychologists assist people with typical and atypical problems of functioning and wellbeing, but are not specialists in the treatment of mental disorder, as Clinical Psychologists are. Counselling psychologists utilise psychotherapy and counselling methods in combination with the scientific research from the field of psychology, which is the study of human behaviour and functioning.

Dietician

A dietician is a registered health professional with a science degree in human nutrition and a post-graduate diploma in dietetics. Dieticians use scientific-based nutrition management strategies to assist people to achieve optimal nutrition and health. Evidence has shown that nutrition is important for psychological and emotional wellbeing. We recommend finding a dietician who has specialised in the relationship between food and mood. You can find a registered Dietician in New Zealand at www.dieticians.org.nz/find-a-dietician-2/

Educational Psychologist

Educational Psychologists work to help people with learning and development and typically work within the school system, but this is not always the case – people of all ages can have difficulties related to learning and development. The New Zealand Psychologists Board says “Educational Psychologists apply psychological knowledge and theory derived from research to the area of learning and development, to assist children, young persons, adults and their families regarding their learning, academic performance, behavioural, social and emotional development, by using psychological and educational assessments and applying interventions using systemic, ecological and developmental approaches.”

General Practitioner (GP) Doctor

A GP is a general medical doctor who provides treatment for acute and chronic health problems. A GP is not specialised to diagnose or provide treatment for mental health problems, but they do have the capacity to prescribe medications. A GP also has the ability to identify when a mental disorder diagnosis may be appropriate. A GP will usually refer to a psychiatrist for an accurate diagnosis or decisions on medication changes.

GPs can provide advice, support and a range of solutions for the physical-health components of both general and mental wellbeing.

In New Zealand, a GP referral is required for access to all District Health Board mental-health services, most psychiatrists, most support workers and many therapy settings.

Herbalist

A herbalist is a person who has studied the medicinal properties of plants. They utilise this knowledge to use plants and herbs to promote health and wellbeing. Many plants have psychoactive properties or other nutritional components that can be used to alter a person’s state of mind or sense of wellbeing. For example, chamomile and valerian are both known to promote sleep and calm.

Numerous people claim that herbal remedies have assisted them to cope with various distressing symptoms including insomnia and anxiety. Others have utilised medicinal herbs to replace pharmacological sleeping aides.

Medicinal herbs can have powerful properties and it is important to obtain appropriate advice before taking them. It is important to check that herbal supplements do not interact with any existing medications you may be on before you start taking the supplement. In New Zealand, check that your herbalist is a member of the New Zealand Association of Medicinal Herbalists, by ensuring they have the letters MNZAMH after their name.

Homoeopathist

A Homoeopathist is trained to deliver homeopathy. Homeopathy is a form of alternative medicine which involves treating the individual with highly diluted substances, given mainly in tablet or droplet form, with the aim of triggering the body's natural system of healing.

Homeopathy is based on a system of 'treating like with like', known as the *law of similar*, where preparations which cause certain symptoms in healthy people are given in diluted concentration to people who already exhibit the symptoms. In simple terms, this all translates into, "*that which makes sick, shall heal.*"

For example, caffeine is known to cause insomnia and jitteriness, but when administered in a diluted, homeopathic form known as *Coffea* to people suffering from insomnia, it has been shown to have the opposite effect.

Scientifically, there is mixed evidence for this approach, but many people claim to have found it useful in managing a range of symptoms. In 2000, the House of Lords' Select Committee on Science & Technology cited homeopathy as one of the five Group One therapies, having "an individual diagnostic approach" along with osteopathy, chiropractic, herbal medicine and acupuncture. Check out the New Zealand Homeopathic Society to access a register of qualified homoeopathists in New Zealand.

Hypnotherapist

A hypnotherapist helps people to use their natural hypnotic state to achieve desired changes in their own behaviour and motivations. A hypnotic state is a state of intense relaxation or trance when the brain falls into a very slow form of activity, in which people become highly suggestible. It is true that much of what we have learned as people has been learned by suggestions and these suggestions lodge in the subconscious mind and become our knowledge. A hypnotherapist induces the hypnotic state and uses the power of suggestion to help people access their inner resources in a new way. Hypnotherapists are often trained in other modalities such as psychotherapy or clinical psychology. The techniques can be well combined with other approaches such as cognitive-behaviour therapy. Research has demonstrated hypnotherapy to have effectiveness with anxiety, insomnia, pain management and stress-related conditions. It is used in other areas, but they have not been researched as much. Look for a hypnotherapist who is a member of the New Zealand Society of Clinical and Applied Hypnotherapy and who has undergone an extensive course of study, to ensure they are working to professional and ethical standards.

Life Coach

A Life Coach is a professional who helps people to determine and achieve personal goals and re-create their lives according to their passions. Life coaches are not therapists and do not work with mental unwellness or dysfunction. Instead they focus on identifying and removing barriers to

achieving goals. Coaches support people to find answers and options that may be hidden within themselves, but do not give advice. The role of a life coach has been described as a “sounding board” or “motivator”.

Mental Health Promoter

Mental Health Promoters are concerned with social change and work to advance the concept of mental health and its components amongst the wider community and across the life-span. They use the media, public events and private workshops to share concepts of positive mental health, increase understandings of poor mental health and encourage the capacity of individuals to support each other towards increased wellbeing. The largest employer of Mental Health Promoters in New Zealand is the Ministry of Health, via its Like Minds, Like Mine project. Engage Aotearoa also considers itself a Mental Health Promotion company.

Naturopath

A naturopath is a medical practitioner who believes in harnessing the natural power of the body to heal itself, using natural and holistic means. Naturopathy assumes that the body naturally strives for wellness and stability, and that with a little help, the body can be encouraged to be healthy. To achieve this, a naturopath relies on a number of treatments, ranging from massage therapy and other physical treatments to counseling. The intent is for patient and care provider to work together as a team, addressing the patient's body holistically. Like many other alternative medical practices, naturopathy places a heavy focus on preventative medicine, and at getting to the root cause of a problem, rather than treating the symptoms alone. A naturopath is trained in nutrition, herbal medicine and massage, among other things, and may specialise in certain ailments or population groups like allergies, fertility or reflexology. Drugs and surgery are not offered by a naturopath, but a patient who needs these services will be referred to a medical doctor. Exact qualifications vary, but in New Zealand, you should look for a Naturopath who has a diploma in Naturopathy and is a member of the NZ Society of Naturopaths.

Nutritionist

A nutritionist has a science degree with a major in Human Nutrition (or the equivalent qualification from a recognised international university) and should be registered with the Nutrition Society of New Zealand. A nutritionist specialises in the study of nutrition, including nutritional deficiencies, sources of nutrition, and nutritional challenges which may face individuals or communities. A dietician is a type of more specialised nutritionist who is more likely to work in clinical situations. A nutritionist can help you to understand what is in your food and what kinds of foods to eat more or less of. Some foods are known as Mood Foods because they contain nutrients essential for positive mood-states and functioning.

Peer Support Worker

A peer support worker is a person who has had personal experience of mental disorder and recovery. They have been trained to help people to identify, plan for and achieve personally relevant goals towards enhancing their sense of autonomy or free-will. A peer support worker walks alongside a person with experience of mental unwellness, to convey hope and offer both practical and moral support.

Psychiatrist

A Psychiatrist is a medical doctor who has specialised in the study and medical treatment of mental disorders. A psychiatrist works from a medical and biological understanding of human functioning as this is the foundation of their training as a doctor. Psychiatry literally means ‘medical treatment of

the mind' and this definition quite nicely sums up what a psychiatrist does. Psychiatrists are the only mental-health professionals who can prescribe medication for mental disorders.

In Psychiatry, mental disorders are currently viewed as disorders of brain circuits likely caused by developmental processes shaped by a complex interplay of genetics and experience. On the other hand, in psychology, mental disorder is viewed not as a problem of the brain but as the interplay between interpretation or thought, the body (including the brain), behaviour and environment (past and present). A psychologist specialises in the behavioural, social, emotional and cognitive (thought) based treatment of the mind. Both clinical psychologists and psychiatrists use the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders to diagnose and assess people's experiences. This manual sets out the criteria that define each type of mental disorder and is currently being revised. The revision will be known as the DSM-5 and will be published in 2013.

Psychiatrists typically focus their treatments on the prescription of medication to alleviate symptoms and discussing how the medication is working; however they have the training to offer talking psychotherapy as well. Psychiatrists have not necessarily been trained in delivering scientifically supported psychological interventions but some have taken the time to do this extra learning.

For people under compulsory treatment orders, visits to a psychiatrist can be court-ordered and the person can be compelled by the court to take the medication that the psychiatrist prescribes.

Psychologist (General)

Psychology is the science of mind and behaviour. The New Zealand Psychologists Board says "A psychologist within a general scope is defined as rendering or offering to render to individuals, groups, organisations or the public any psychological service involving the application of psychological knowledge, principles, methods and procedures of understanding, predicting ameliorating or influencing behaviour, affect or cognition."

Psychologists must work within the scope of their training and you should ask them what their area of specialisation is. A general psychologist has studied in detail a specific area of human functioning. This could relate to emotion regulation, cognition, perception, behaviour change, development, learning, social processes, coping, social change, group dynamics, organisational behaviour, motivation, family relationships and physical health. A general psychologist could have specialised in working at the individual, group, family, organisational or community level and again, you will need to check with them to find out what their area of expertise is.

Psychologists registered under the General Scope tend to work as Community psychologists, Health psychologists, Research psychologists and Social psychologists.

General psychologists must have a minimum of a Master's Degree in psychology and 1500 hours of supervised work and they must be registered members of the New Zealand Psychologists Board.

Psychotherapist

A psychotherapist is a person trained in delivering talking therapy for the alleviation of diagnosable problems of living or existential crises. Psychotherapy can also involve additional methods to facilitate talking such as drama and role-play, visual art or writing and play.

Psychotherapists typically aim to assist clients to understand how their past shapes their present, towards identifying new more helpful ways of understanding and interacting with the world. Psychotherapists have been trained to use a range of techniques based on relationship building, communication, belief-systems and behaviour change that are designed to improve individual

mental health or the quality of relationships. Common approaches to psychotherapy are outlined in the Treatment Information Sheet on the Engage Aotearoa website and can range from Gestalt approaches through to Transactional Analysis. Interestingly, research on the effectiveness of psychotherapy suggests that the form of approach is less important than the quality of your relationship with the psychotherapist and the personal attributes of the psychotherapist themselves, particularly whether the therapist themselves believes that the approach they use will be effective.

Typically, psychotherapists work from a 'psychodynamic' viewpoint that conceptualises disorder as the result of an interplay or conflict between the different levels of our awareness, the many roles we fill and the expectations and judgements that we attach to those roles. Others may work from a Cognitive-Behavioural standpoint or any one of a range of approaches, each with varying levels of effectiveness. Psychotherapists may or may not have studied mental disorder and its treatment. They may or may not have trained in the delivery of scientifically-supported treatment approaches.

To legally practise psychotherapy in New Zealand, a psychotherapist must be registered and hold an annual practising certificate (APC). Look for a psychotherapist who has a minimum of a Masters Degree in psychotherapy. It is also a good idea to find out what approach they use and whether the evidence supports its use for your particular problem.

Occupational Therapist (OT)

Occupational therapy promotes health by enabling people to perform meaningful and purposeful occupational activities. Occupational activities are the activities of everyday life including those of self-care, leisure, employment and social interaction, which lead to a fulfilling and healthy life. An OT works with individuals, families or groups to improve wellbeing via engagement with these meaningful occupational activities. Some of this work might be around the removal of barriers to participation or the creation of aides to help a person overcome any barriers. Other work focuses on identifying activities that would be meaningful and identifying how they might be engaged with. Other work might centre on the development of new skills and knowledge that would enable engagement. OTs specialise in working with a range of different groups of people, so it is important to ask questions about what their specialty is and how they approach things. This way you can ensure there is a good match between what you need and what the OT is qualified to provide. It's also a good way to see whether you like the OT, as a positive rapport with your OT will help a lot.

In New Zealand, an OT should have a current annual practicing certificate and be registered with the New Zealand OT Board: www.otboard.org.nz. You can access an OT through most mental-health services. You may also be able to access a private OT through your primary healthcare service.

Social Worker

Social workers provide advice, advocacy and support to people with personal and social problems. The main aim of social work as a discipline is to promote social welfare, social justice and social change. Social work is a really diverse field and social workers perform a range of jobs. In the field of mental health, social workers are commonly found working as vocational workers, key-workers, residential support workers or community support workers. In this capacity they work with individuals and their families, towards promoting independent living and access to social amenities, including treatment and other support options. Social workers also work with people in Child Youth and Family Services, where there may be safety considerations for youth or other members of a family.

Support Worker (Community, Residential or Key)

A support worker is a mental-health professional who works with individuals to promote independent, healthy living. A Residential Support Worker partners with people who are currently living in a supported accommodation setting. A Community Support Worker partners with people who are living in the community, either alone or with their families. A Key-Worker is a common term used to describe a support worker who is an individual's designated or 'key' (main) support worker, when the service is being delivered by a team.

In all cases the Support Worker helps the individual to identify personal goals for autonomous living and helps them build a plan to work towards that place. Support Workers provide a means of support through conversation, regular visits or check-ins and assistance in accessing other support and treatment options, including help to attend important meetings. Support workers can assist in the development of Advanced Directives, which is an outline of how you wish to be treated, should you become unwell enough to warrant intervention. To access a Support Worker, you need a referral from your doctor.

What Next?

We welcome your feedback on this information. If there is a profession that you think is missing from this list, please let us know.

Other Engage Aotearoa information resources include:

- Coping Information
- What is Mental Illness?
- What is Recovery?
- Treatments Information
- The Community Resources Directory
- Online Resources Sheet
- and The Coping Kete