

## **Adult Clinical Neuropsychology – Answers to Frequently asked Questions**

### **What is Clinical Neuropsychology?**

Clinical neuropsychology is a specialty field within clinical psychology, dedicated to understanding the relationships between brain and behavior, particularly as these relationships can be applied to the diagnosis of brain disorder, assessment of cognitive and behavioral functioning, and the design of effective treatment. Western Washington Medical Group (WWMG) Department of Psychology has two neuropsychologists, Douglas Whiteside, PhD, ABPP/CN and Lee Kearns, PsyD.

### **What is a Clinical Neuropsychologist?**

Clinical neuropsychologists, such as Dr. Whiteside and Dr. Kearns, are independent, professional, doctoral level psychologists who provide assessment and intervention services to people of all ages, based upon the scientific concepts of clinical neuropsychology. Training in clinical neuropsychology comprises a broad background in clinical psychology, as well as specialized training and experience in clinical neuropsychology.

Training and preparation in clinical neuropsychology specifically entails 1.) Completion of a doctoral degree in psychology from an accredited university training program, 2.) Internship in a clinically relevant area of professional psychology, 3.) The equivalent of two years of additional specialized training in clinical neuropsychology, and 4.) State or provincial licensure to practice psychology and/or clinical neuropsychology independently. Attainment of the ABCN/ABPP Diploma in Clinical Neuropsychology (i.e., board certification) is the clearest evidence of competence as a clinical neuropsychologist, assuring that all of these criteria have been met. WWMG is the only provider group with board certified neuropsychologist who evaluate both adults and children between Seattle and Bellingham.

### **What happens during a neuropsychological evaluation?**

The neuropsychological evaluation consists of gathering relevant historical information, a neuropsychological examination, analysis and integration of data and findings, and feedback to the referral source. History is obtained through reviewing medical and other records, and through interview with the patient. With the patient's permission, family members or other knowledgeable persons may be interviewed and asked to share their perceptions and perspective on important aspects of the history and symptoms. The examination typically consists of the administration of standardized tests using oral questions, paper and pencil, computers, the manipulation of materials such as blocks and puzzles, and other procedures. Depending on the scope and intent of the evaluation,

testing may focus on a wide range of cognitive functions including attention, memory, language, academic skills, reasoning and problem solving, visuospatial ability, and sensory-motor skills. The neuropsychologist may also administer tests and questionnaires concerning psychological aspects of mood, emotional style, behavior, and personality. Some or all of the testing is usually administered by a neuropsychology technician, under the direct supervision of the clinical neuropsychologist. The amount of direct contact time required for the patient will depend on the scope of the specific evaluation; the evaluation might be a brief screening requiring as little as an hour or a comprehensive assessment spread requiring 8 hours or more, spread out over several appointments.

### **What will happen after the evaluation?**

After the evaluation, the clinical neuropsychologist will analyze all of the data and information gathered by history and examination, integrating it into a comprehensive report. Again, depending upon the referral issue and scope of the evaluation, the report will provide a description of neuropsychological strengths and weaknesses, patterns of findings that have diagnostic significance, and recommendations for further evaluation and/or treatment. The clinical neuropsychologist typically schedule a follow-up consultation with you to review the findings and recommendations, and address any questions of concerns you may have. After you sign release forms, the report will usually be shared with the doctor (or other professional) who initiated the referral and other health care providers involved in your care.

### **Examples of common referral issues**

The neuropsychologists at WWMG see a wide variety of children, adults, and older adults who have concerns about their thinking skills and emotions. Some examples of common referral questions include:

1. Learning and development: Does this person have a developmental disorder affecting learning? If so, how can we help him to circumvent these weaknesses and provide the best learning environment for success? Does this person have a Learning Disorder or other disorder such as Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder that affects their ability to learn or function in employment?
2. What are the enduring effects of a neurological injury or illness and what treatment might help? This question is asked of many types of presenting problems, including traumatic brain injury, multiple sclerosis, fibromyalgia, lupus, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, encephalopathy due to liver or kidney disease, heart problems, sleep apnea, diabetes, seizures, thyroid disease, depression, anxiety, and many more.
3. Memory and aging: Is this normal age-related change or a disease? Or is it something else?
4. Changes in personality and behavior: Are these symptoms of a psychiatric disorder or do they signify a brain-related syndrome?
5. For litigation purposes: whether a person's cognitive problems are a consequence of some kind of accident?

**Is the neuropsychological evaluation covered by my insurance?**

If your evaluation is for a medical reason, it is usually covered. The WWMG Psychology staff will be able to work with you to determine your exact coverage. We take almost all major insurance plans, including Medicare, Regence, Premera, and Aetna. Since these evaluations are for medical reasons instead of mental health reasons, they are typically billed under the **MEDICAL** benefits part of your insurance and not your mental health coverage. This can be confusing, since this is a medical procedure that is performed by psychologists.

**Contact Our Neuropsychologists:**

The neuropsychologists at WWMG can be reached at the Department of Psychology, (425) 259-1366. The address is 3525 Colby Avenue, Suite 200, Everett, WA 98201. We are conveniently located just south of downtown Everett.