

Identifying a Good Psychiatrist

Check with other families who have relatives with mental health conditions to see if they have had good experiences with a particular psychiatrist, one who:

- Will make special efforts to communicate with the family; can speak using terms you can understand
- Won't insist that your Service Member makes the initial contact, but rather recognizes that they may be in crisis and unable to do so
- Will make special efforts to communicate. For instance, taking five minutes in the middle or at the end of a session to ask the patient's family in to learn their views on how things are going.
- Recognizes the condition is a no-fault brain disorder
- Is strong enough not to be threatened by views of the family or the individual on treatment; willing to discuss openly symptoms, medications and side effects, and the limits of his/her knowledge, while remaining in command of the treatment. While psychiatrists are trained to be vigilant about boundaries, any psychiatrist who communicates the idea that there is a special mystique in psychiatry that you can't understand isn't the kind of doctor you want.
- Is flexible enough to customize treatment for your relative and to enlist families as part of the treatment team when that is indicated, e.g., as observers and reporters on the response to changes in treatment
- Is innovative enough to consider alternative ways to engage with people who don't think they have a mental health condition
- Is accommodating enough to schedule visits at less frequent intervals to match the family's financial ability; communicates that he/she is more concerned about finding outcomes that satisfy the entire family than about maximizing their own income
- Takes seriously and respects the information communicated by the family regarding the status of the patient

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NAMI Homefront 2015