

School: ATEC – Medical Management
Course: Understanding Psych Reports & Cross-Examining Psych Doctors
Faculty: Dr. Ron C. Heredia, Director, Good Mood Legal

Summary

In the course titled "Understanding Psych Reports & Cross-Examining Psych Doctors," Dr. Ron C. Heredia provides an in-depth exploration of the essential components of psychological reports in workers' compensation cases and offers practical guidance for cross-examining psychological experts.

Dr. Heredia begins by emphasizing the importance of understanding the essentials of psych reports, including what should and should not be included. He explains that a good psych report must contain comprehensive support for the doctor's diagnosis, which can be found in the patient's life history, presenting complaints, mental status examination results, psychological testing data, and collateral sources of information.

A significant portion of the presentation focuses on common deficiencies in psychological reports. Dr. Heredia highlights that many reports fail to provide a complete qualitative history of the patient's symptoms, instead offering only summary conclusions without detailed observational data. He introduces the FIDOC method (Frequency, Intensity, Duration, Onset, and Course) as a framework for ensuring a thorough qualitative history. For example, a report should specify the frequency of symptoms (e.g., how often the patient feels depressed), the intensity (e.g., on a scale of 1 to 10), the duration (e.g., how long the depression lasts each time), the onset (e.g., when the depression first began), and the course over time (e.g., whether symptoms have improved, worsened, or remained stable).

Dr. Heredia also addresses the importance of mental status examinations, which should include detailed observations of the patient's mood, memory, concentration, insight, and judgment. He notes that many reports lack these detailed observations, instead providing only summary conclusions like "memory was intact" or "concentration was fair" without supporting descriptions.

Psychological testing is another critical area covered in the course. Dr. Heredia explains that tests like the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) should be included in every psych report, and the scores must be provided. He emphasizes the importance of validity scales within these tests to assess the credibility of the patient's responses. For instance, high scores on the L, F, and K scales can indicate dishonesty or exaggeration, which should be addressed in the report.

Dr. Heredia advises that cross-examiners should focus on questioning the support for diagnoses within the report. He recommends avoiding open-ended questions and instead asking specific questions about where in the report the support for the diagnosis can be found. For example, rather than asking the doctor to describe the patient's depression, one should ask, "Where in your report can I find the mental status examination results that support your diagnosis?"

The course also covers common psychological diagnoses, such as major depressive disorder, and the criteria outlined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). Dr. Heredia points out that a valid diagnosis must meet specific criteria, such as the presence of five out of nine symptoms for at least a two-week period for major depressive disorder. He encourages cross-examiners to scrutinize whether these criteria are met in the report.

Finally, Dr. Heredia discusses strategies for utilizing psychological report reviews and cross-examinations to influence case outcomes. These include getting a consultation report, drafting specific questions for depositions, and using the information to negotiate favorable settlements or dismiss unsupported claims.

In summary, Dr. Heredia's course provides valuable insights into the critical elements of psych reports and practical strategies for effectively cross-examining psych doctors, ultimately aiming to improve the accuracy and fairness of workers' compensation claims involving psychological issues.

Learning Objectives

1. Understand the essential components and structure of psychological reports in workers' compensation cases.
2. Identify common red flags and deficiencies in psychological reports.
3. Learn effective techniques and questions for cross-examining psychological experts.
4. Gain knowledge of psychological testing, including the importance of validity scales and how to interpret test results.
5. Explore strategies for utilizing psychological report reviews and cross-examinations to influence case outcomes.

Primary Takeaways

1. Psychological reports should include comprehensive patient history, mental status examinations, and detailed psychological testing data to be considered substantial medical evidence.

2. Common deficiencies in psychological reports include a lack of detailed observations supporting summary conclusions and incomplete qualitative history of symptoms.
3. Cross-examiners should focus on questioning the support for diagnoses within the report and avoid open-ended questions that allow for unverifiable responses.
4. Validity scales in psychological testing are crucial for assessing the credibility of the test taker; high scores on these scales indicate potential dishonesty or exaggeration.
5. Effective cross-examination can lead to discrediting a psychological report, influencing settlements, or dismissing unsupported claims.

Course Outline

- 1) Introduction to Psychological Reports and Cross-Examination
 - a) Importance of understanding psych reports in workers' compensation
 - b) Goals of the session and introduction to Dr. Ron Heredia
- 2) Components of a Comprehensive Psych Report
 - a) Patient's life history and presenting complaints
 - i) Frequency, Intensity, Duration, Onset, and Course (FIDOC) of symptoms
 - ii) Common issues with qualitative history
 - b) Mental status examination
 - i) Observations of mood, memory, concentration, insight, and judgment
 - ii) Importance of detailed observational data
- 3) Psychological Testing and Its Importance
 - a) Types of psychological tests
 - i) MMPI-2 and its validity scales
 - ii) Other tests with and without validity scales
 - b) Interpretation of test results
 - i) High scores on L, F, and K scales indicating dishonesty or exaggeration
 - ii) Addressing possible invalid test scores
- 4) Effective Cross-Examination Techniques
 - a) Focusing on the support for diagnoses within the report
 - i) Asking specific questions about the report's contents
 - ii) Avoiding open-ended questions
 - b) Strategies for questioning psychological experts
 - i) Attacking the diagnosis
 - ii) Questioning the report only

- 5) Common Psychological Diagnoses and DSM Criteria
 - a) Major depressive disorder and its criteria
 - i) Requirement of five out of nine symptoms for a two-week period
 - ii) Importance of duration and frequency of symptoms
 - b) Other common diagnoses and their DSM criteria

- 6) Utilizing Cross-Examination and Report Reviews
 - a) Cost-saving strategies in psych claims
 - i) Consulting reports and drafting questions
 - ii) Using depositions to influence settlements or dismiss claims
 - b) Preparing for cross-examinations
 - i) Persistent questioning and avoiding word salad responses
 - ii) Ensuring credible reports with substantial evidence

- 7) Conclusion and Final Thoughts
 - a) Recap of key points and strategies
 - b) Contact information for further consultation and questions

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