

Mental Health Diversion: Practical Applications for Strengthening Evaluations and Reports

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Level

Intermediate

Room

Track

Legal

CE

CPA/BBS/CJER/MCLE

Bio

Morgan Shaw, PsyD is a clinical forensic psychologist and owner of Shaw Psychological Services in San Diego, CA. She specializes in the assessment and treatment of trauma-related issues and regularly conducts comprehensive psychological evaluations for a variety of psycho-legal issues. She currently serves as Co-Editor for three professional journals including the *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* and the *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment, and Trauma*, and is the Chair of the Board of Directors of Children's Legal Services of San Diego.

Chris Garnica, PsyD, earned her doctorate in Clinical Psychology with an emphasis in Trauma- Focused Forensic Psychology from the California School of Professional Psychology (CSPP) at Alliant International University, San Diego (AIU-SD). Chris also earned a Master of Arts (MA) in Clinical Psychology from CSPP at AIU-SD, two Master of Science (MS) degrees from Loyola University New Orleans in Clinical Mental Health Counseling and Criminology & Justice, as well as a Bachelor of Science (BS) in Psychology & Sociology from Tulane University. Chris presently works in the field of forensic psychology, specializing in forensic psychological evaluation and assessment.

Narrative

In the state of California, many of the largest behavioral health systems are within correctional institutions, as people involved with the justice system experience very high rates of mental health conditions. It is estimated that 60% of incarcerated individuals in California have substance use disorders and one-quarter have serious mental illness; these numbers have risen significantly in the past ten years alone. Complex social issues such as homelessness, unemployment, and poverty exacerbate and compound the revolving door of individuals who end up in the county jail system only to be released back into the same environment they were in prior to their incarceration, with limited access to mental health resources and medical supports. As a means to address this complex issue, California implemented Assembly Bill (AB) 1810 on June 27, 2018, codified in PC § 1001.35 and 1001.36, creating an opportunity for the court to divert certain misdemeanor or felony crimes to allow a defendant to undergo mental health treatment. Even though it has been over five years since the implementation of this program across the state, there has been minimal information provided to the public about the effectiveness and utility of the program. Additionally, each county seems to be addressing it and incorporating it differently into their respective systems. This workshop aims to provide an overview of the mental health diversion program and its key elements, and will also address how mental health professionals can appropriately assess an individual's appropriateness for the program. This includes interview strategies, assessments, and report writing elements, as well as a discussion of frequently seen concerns within evaluations and reports. Practical suggestions for strengthening evaluations and reports will be provided.

Learning Objectives

1. Explain three legal statutes governing mental health diversion and apply it practically within a mental health role
2. Identify three key elements necessary to determine appropriateness for the California mental health diversion program
3. Describe two common pitfalls and ways to address frequently seen problems within mental health diversion evaluations and reports