College can be a very exciting time, full of opportunities for growth and self-discovery. It also, at times, can be stressful. In fact, in a 2016 survey conducted by the American College Health Association, approximately 38% of college students reported feeling so depressed that it interfered with their functioning and approximately 60% of college students reported experiencing overwhelming anxiety. College students experiencing mental health concerns, such as anxiety and depression, may wish to pursue counseling and/or medication management. At the University Health Services (UHS) Counseling Center, we support students in taking care of their emotional well-being so that they can take full advantage of all that the University of Massachusetts Boston has to offer.

If you are reading this referral guide, it is likely because you wish to pursue counseling/medication evaluation and/or management off campus or the UHS Counseling Center recommended a referral for off-campus counseling or medication. The UHS Counseling Center has developed this guide to provide you with assistance in this process. We feel that it is to your benefit to be aware of the steps involved in the referral process so that you can actively participate in the establishment of your off-campus mental health services.

Please keep in mind that “mental health provider” or “behavioral health provider” or “clinician” are umbrella terms for a range of professionals including, psychologists, clinical social workers, mental health counselors, marriage and family therapists, psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses, etc. Before contacting your insurance company, clarify the type of provider you want or need to see. The section at the end of this guide defines/describes the specific types of mental health providers.

Off-campus mental health providers and/or agencies operate independently from the UHS Counseling Center; thus, we have no control over their policies and procedures. Ultimately, it is your responsibility to determine whether the selected individual mental health provider and/or agency is an appropriate fit for you. Because of this, we strongly recommend that you take the time to research information on potential providers and/or agencies (tips on how to do this are provided below) and ask them the necessary questions you feel will help you determine whether the identified provider and/or agency is a good match for you.

When establishing off campus mental health services, follow these 5 steps:

1. Contact your insurance company to obtain a list of covered mental health providers. You can do this by either:
   a. Calling the 800 number on the back of your insurance card OR
   b. Visiting your insurance company's website

2. In order to increase the likelihood of finding a good fit with a therapist, we recommend that you consider and/or identify any preferences you might have (e.g., a female or male therapist, a bilingual therapist, a therapist who specializes in anxiety, an Asian American therapist, accessible by public transportation, wheelchair accessible, etc.). Additionally, when contacting your insurance company, be sure to ask about the number of sessions covered per policy year.

3. Insurance companies typically do not provide an abundance of information about mental health providers; however, more and more therapists have websites. Use therapists’ websites or resources such as Psychology Today (http://therapists.psychologytoday.com/rms/), the American Psychological Association’s Psychologist Locator (http://locator.apa.org/) or the Social Work Therapy Referral Service of the National Association of Social Workers/ Massachusetts Chapter (http://www.therapymatcher.org/find_counselor.htm) to help you identify providers and additional information about them. Keep in mind, however, that therapists elect to be included on these websites, so not all providers can be found in these resources. Also, because off-campus mental health providers do not always have openings and/or may not feel they can offer you what you need, we recommend that you contact at least 3-5 providers. Psychiatrists often have longer waitlists that are 2-3 months long.
4. Keep in mind that most off-campus mental health providers will have answering and/or voicemail message services, so do not be discouraged if they do not answer and be prepared to leave a message. In your message, we suggest you include the following information:

   a. Your name
   b. Your insurance type
   c. Why you are seeking counseling and/or medication
   d. Times you are available for appointments
   e. Who referred you, which most likely will be the UHS Counseling Center at UMass Boston
   f. A callback number and when you are free to speak on the phone or permission for them to leave a message indicating who they are and the purpose of the call.

5. Keep in mind that most off-campus mental health providers return phone calls in the evening or within the next couple of business days, so try not to get discouraged if you do not get an immediate response. If it has been a few days and you still have not heard back from a provider, then you might want to call and leave a second message.

When you speak with a mental health provider for the first time either on the phone or in person, consider asking some of the following questions:

1. Are you more past- or present-oriented? Are you more reflective or interactive in sessions? Are you more focused on helping people to understand their behavior or change their behavior?
2. What is your experience working with the issues I’m presenting?
3. How long have you been in practice?
4. What degree do you hold?
5. What is your confidentiality policy?
6. How often can we meet?
7. What do you charge for services? Do you accept my insurance?
8. What is your cancellation policy?
9. If I were to need medication, do you have psychiatrists or other prescribers with whom you work?
10. How do I get in touch with you in the event of an emergency?

Research (e.g., Horvath, Del Re, Fluckiger, & Symonds, 2011; Lambert & Barley, 2002; Norcross & Wampold, 2011) consistently demonstrates that the therapeutic relationship substantially contributes to the outcome of therapy. Determining whether or not a therapist is a good match for you; thus, is very important. The above suggested questions are offered to help guide you in selecting a therapist, but we also strongly encourage you to pay attention to how you feel when you meet with a potential therapist for the first time. For example, did you feel respected, heard, and understood? Did you feel comfortable and at ease? In addition, you might want to consider having an initial meeting with more than one therapist or prescriber, understanding though that that may reduce the number of remaining sessions with the mental health provider(s) you ultimately select.

Establishing off-campus mental health services can, at times, be a complicated process, but learning to take good care of your mental and physical health and to navigate the health care system is a very useful skill. Remember that the UHS Counseling Center is here to provide you with assistance in this process. This referral guide provides you with tips and suggested steps to follow, but please do not hesitate to contact us at 617-287-5690 to schedule a consultation if you have any further questions or would like additional assistance with the referral process.
Types of Mental Health Providers

**Psychologist** – A psychologist is a licensed professional with a doctoral degree (Ph.D., Psy.D., Ed.D.) in clinical, counseling, or educational psychology. Psychologists offer a range of services such as psychotherapy (individual, group, couples, etc.), diagnostic assessments, psychological testing and evaluation, and research.

**Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (LICSW)** – A clinical social worker is an independently licensed professional with a master’s (M.S., M.S.W., or M.S.S.W.) or doctoral (D.S.W. or Ph.D.) degree in social work. A clinical social worker’s licensure depends on his/her level of education, training, and experience. Clinical social workers provide a range of services including psychotherapy, assessment, case management, and hospital discharge planning.

**Licensed Professional/Mental Health Counselor (LPC/LMHC)** – A licensed professional counselor is a licensed professional with a master’s degree (M.A.) in counseling or a similarly related field. Licensure requirements vary by state, but licensed professional counselors typically have at least 2 years of post-graduate clinical experience. Licensed professional counselors typically provide counseling (individual, family, group, etc.).

**Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist (LMFT)** – A marriage and family therapist is a licensed professional with at least a master’s degree and 2 years post-graduate experience. LMFTs are specially trained to work with the entire family and provide services such as individual, marital, couples, and family therapy.

**Psychiatrist** – A psychiatrist is a licensed professional with a medical degree (M.D.). Psychiatrists are medical doctors who specialize in the evaluation and treatment of mental health concerns. Psychiatrists prescribe and monitor medications for individual clients. While some psychiatrists focus on medication evaluation and management only, others also offer psychotherapy services.


References


