

# Differences Between Treatment and Assessment Roles

Psychiatrists may be involved in mental health care in different ways. This leaflet explains the difference between **treatment roles** and **assessment roles**, and why these distinctions are important.

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## Treating Psychiatrist

A treating psychiatrist is responsible for:

- Assessing mental health symptoms
- Providing ongoing treatment
- Managing medication where appropriate
- Monitoring progress over time
- Supporting recovery and functioning

The treating psychiatrist develops a **therapeutic relationship** with the patient and works collaboratively to support care.

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## Assessment Roles

Assessment roles include:

- Independent Medical Examinations (IMEs)
- Medico-legal assessments
- One-off or time-limited evaluations

These roles are usually requested by:

- Insurers
- Employers
- Courts or legal representatives

Assessment roles are **not treatment roles**.

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## Purpose of Assessments

Assessment roles focus on:

- Providing an independent opinion
- Answering specific referral questions
- Assessing diagnosis, impairment, or capacity
- Reviewing available information at a point in time

They do not involve ongoing care or treatment.

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## Independence and Objectivity

Assessment roles require:

- Independence
- Objectivity
- Lack of therapeutic involvement

For this reason, a psychiatrist cannot usually act as both a **treating clinician** and an **independent assessor** for the same matter.

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## Differences in Approach

<b>Treating Role</b>	<b>Assessment Role</b>
Ongoing care	One-off or limited
Therapeutic focus	Evaluative focus
Collaborative	Independent
Treatment planning	Opinion and reporting
Longitudinal view	Snapshot in time

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## Limitations of Each Role

### Treating Psychiatrist

- Focuses on care, not legal outcomes
- May not provide independent opinions
- Opinions are based on clinical engagement

### Assessment Psychiatrist

- Does not provide treatment
  - Does not advocate for any party
  - Does not manage ongoing care
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## Why These Boundaries Matter

Clear role boundaries:

- Protect the therapeutic relationship
- Support ethical practice
- Reduce conflicts of interest
- Improve clarity for all parties

Blurring roles can compromise both care and assessment quality.

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## Requests for Reports and Opinions

Requests for reports or opinions should:

- Clarify the purpose of the request
- Identify whether a treating or assessment role is required

Some requests may not be appropriate within a treating role.

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## WorkCover and Medico-Legal Contexts

In WorkCover or legal matters:

- Treating psychiatrists provide clinical care
- Independent assessors provide evaluative opinions

Both roles contribute differently to the overall process.

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## Questions and Clarification

If you are unsure:

- What role a psychiatrist is acting in
- What type of report is being requested

Please discuss this during your appointment.

Clear understanding of roles helps reduce confusion and frustration.

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