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Substance Abuse Evaluations

Clients who seek my services for a substance abuse evaluation usually do so for one of 5 reasons:

- (1) occupational requirement - for safety and risk management reasons, some employees must return to their employer or entity, e.g. DOT, Coast Guard, with a clean bill of health before licensure is granted;
- (2) behavior problem, suspicion of drug use - someone has complained about the client's behavior or temperament, and either drug or alcohol abuse is suspected.
- (3) behavior problem, exploratory - the degree to which recreational use versus impairment needs to be determined usually in a therapeutic context.
- (4) forensic examination, Criminal or Civil - Clients are being adjudicated for related offenses and either voluntarily or involuntarily present for evaluation.
- (5) forensic examination, custody evaluation - Clients are going through a divorce and one spouse makes an allegation about the other; since custody is always about the children's welfare, evaluations are either agreed to by the attorneys versus being ordered by the Court.

Format

There are many formats / protocols for such evaluations. Mine consists of the following:

- (a) Completion of hand-written questionnaires;
- (b) Completion of Substance Abuse Assessment tool(s);
- (c) A series of individual interviews with clients, usually 2; complex cases sometimes require 3-4.
- (d) Scope of clinical foci includes psychoactive substance history; history of broad spectrum addictive disorders; mental health functioning; family system identification; collateral (family member, friend, sponsor, therapist) interview; records review; and drug testing.
- (e) Drug testing will be conducted by an independent laboratory, where sample collection is monitored by a technician. Tests will be scheduled by the client; additionally, the client will be notified by Evaluator on a random basis twice during the interview period and prior to the dissemination of the final report to present to the laboratory for additional testing. The client will be given only a 24-hour window in which to comply with the notification. Urine, hair, saliva, blood, or metered exhalation are the kinds of testing that may be used. In some cases, on-site over-the-counter products may be administered, but these do not have the same reliability measures on which to base opinions offered in court-related testimony.
- (f) Summary findings and review of the draft narrative will be conducted with the client prior to the dissemination of any report.
- (g) Consent will be necessary before beginning any phase of the substance abuse evaluation.
- (h) Additional consent is necessary before any reports will be generated to any third parties.
- (i) Clients will be given a copy of the final narrative, but official copies will be mailed to the party for whom it is intended, provided client consents.

Fees

I bill at the rate of \$200 per 60-minute unit hour for the following: client and/or collateral interviewing; review of records; review of substantive emails or long text messages (not those to set up appointments); substantive phone calls in excess of 5 minutes. For therapeutic evaluations,

where abbreviated documentation is required, the rate is \$160 per 60-minute unit hour. Narratives are prepared when the client is not present and are billed at the rate of \$50 per page, maximum of \$1000.

Typically the fee schedule is **approximately** the following:

<i>Occupational 1-2 meetings</i>	<i>Format</i>	<i>Length of Time</i>	<i>Fees \$160 per hour</i>
	Goals & Outcomes	15 min	\$40.00
	Review Questionnaires;	15 min	\$40.00
	Substance History &	30 min	\$80.00
	Brief Mental Health Assessment;	8 min	\$20.00
	No collateral interview;	-	-
	Same or next day laboratory test;	-	-
	Same or next day narrative.	2 pages	\$100.00
	Review with client / Recommendations	15 min	\$40.00
Courier / Postage	0 min	\$ 5.00	
			TOTAL \$325.00
<i>Behavior Problem, Suspicion or Exploratory 1 meeting</i>	<i>Format</i>	<i>Length of Time</i>	<i>Fees \$120 per hour</i>
	Goals & Outcomes	15 min	\$30.00
	Questionnaires	15 min	\$30.00
	Substance & Addictive Spectrum History	30 min	\$60.00
	Mental Health Assessment	30 min	\$60.00
	Collateral Interview	30 min	\$60.00
	Brief therapy, brief family therapy	30 min	\$60.00
	Referral for Laboratory Testing	0 min	-
	Narrative - None	0 min	-
			TOTAL \$300.00
<i>Forensic examination, Criminal, voluntary, 1-2 meetings</i>	<i>Format</i>	<i>Length of Time</i>	<i>Fees \$160 per hour</i>
	Goals & Outcomes	15 min	\$40.00
	Questionnaires	15 min	\$40.00
	Substance Use History	30 min	\$80.00
	Brief Mental Health Assessment	15 min	\$40.00
	Attorney Consultation	15 min	\$40.00
	Referral for Laboratory Testing	-	-
	Narrative	4 pages	\$200.00
	Review of Narrative, Recommendations	15 min	\$40.00
			TOTAL \$480.00

<i>Forensic examination, Civil Mandated or Criminal Mandated</i>	<i>Format</i>	<i>Length of Time</i>	<i>Fees \$160 per hour Retainer \$500.00 + Balance due prior to reception of work product</i>
2-3 meetings	Goals & Outcomes	15 min	\$40.00
	Questionnaires	15 min	\$40.00
	Substance Use History	30 min	\$80.00
	Extended Mental Health Assessment	30 min	\$80.00
	Collateral Interview	30 min	\$80.00
	Same day laboratory test	-	-
	2 additional random drug tests	-	-
	2nd interview, different day - focus on general functioning; relationships	60 min	\$160.00
	Attorney Consultation	15 min	\$40.00
	Narrative	5 pages	\$250.00
	Review of Narrative, Recommendations	15 min	\$40.00
			TOTAL \$810.00
<i>Forensic, Custody Evaluation</i>	<i>Format</i>	<i>Length of Time</i>	<i>Fees \$160 per hour \$600 retainer + Balance due prior to delivery of final report</i>
2-3 meetings	Goals & Outcomes	15 min	\$40.00
	Questionnaires	15 min	\$40.00
	Substance Use History	30 min	\$80.00
	Extended Mental Health Assessment	30 min	\$80.00
	Review of Records, Documents	15 min	\$40.00
	Same day laboratory test	-	-
	Collateral Interview, 2 nd day	30 min	\$80.00
	2 additional random drug tests	-	-
	2nd interview, 2 nd day - (Foci - general functioning; relationships)	75 min	\$200.00
	Attorney Consultation - NONE	-	-
	Narrative	6 pages	\$300.00
	Review of Narrative	15 min	\$40.00
	Consultation with Custody Evaluator	30 min	\$60.00
			TOTAL \$960.00

Retainers

Retainers are required for all forensic evaluations – see the chart above. In some cases, the Evaluator may negotiate a reduction in retainer with a schedule of offsetting payments.

Variance

The above chart represents an approximation of time values. The fees will be adjusted if the intervals are shorter or longer.

Description of Procedures

1. Goals & Outcomes – At the outset we define the scope and context of the evaluation; client identifies goals; and “wish-list” vis-à-vis the outcomes and their ramifications.
2. Questionnaires – Evaluator will disseminate 6-12 pages of documents by electronic mail, depending upon the nature of the Substance Abuse Evaluation selected. Client will download the blank forms, complete them, and bring completed forms to the evaluation.
3. Substance Use History – a comprehensive historical inquiry into client’s use of mood-altering chemicals be it medicinally, recreationally or something else and the effects of that use on the client.
4. Substance Abuse Assessment Tools – Standardized protocols used to objectively measure the extent to which evidence is reported of a substance abuse problem.
5. Mental Health Assessment – Attention to client’s strengths and needs; mental status examination; identification of mood disorders, thought disorders, impulse control disorders, adjustment disorders, especially in relation to chemical use. Diagnostics will be used.
6. Review of Records – Documents demonstrating participation in treatment programs, certificates of completion, therapist narratives, collection of sobriety chips, letters of recommendation from sponsors, rap sheet, notifications by licensing or administrative boards.
7. Laboratory Testing – Referral to an independent laboratory for drug and/or alcohol screening. Client must authorize Laboratory to release results to Evaluator, preferably by fax, for timely results.
8. Additional Random Testing – Because substance abusers often attempt to manage their chemical use by staying clean for a few days in anticipation of being drug tested (characteristic of the binge/purge cycle of addiction), testing at random intervals is necessary as a measure of reliability to underscore the accuracy of the Evaluator’s findings. We also know that the 2 chief symptoms of chemical dependency are denial and delusion; therefore, reliance merely on the perspective of the client being evaluated is insufficient to make an accurate determination.
9. Collateral Interviewing – For our purposes, a “collateral” is a person in close relationship with a client, e.g. spouse, parent, child, friend, supervisor, sponsor – who can present another perspective in addition to the client’s regarding client functioning. While clients may elect NOT to use collaterals for their substance abuse evaluation, not doing so calls into question the reliability of the Evaluator’s findings, and the Evaluator will note this in the narrative report.
10. 2nd Day – Usually needed for comprehensive forensic procedures.
11. 3rd Day – Third days are rarely required except in complex cases.
12. Attorney Consultation – Clients being adjudicated in criminal court, or facing contempt

orders in Family or Civil Court, are often either mandated by the Court versus voluntarily presenting for evaluation (and sometimes treatment) in order to demonstrate mitigating circumstances. Since attorneys are interested in outcomes, conferring with them is helpful.

(a) Depending upon the forensic procedure the client is engaged in, there are occasions when attorney consultation is not allowed by the courts. When clients are undergoing a custody evaluation, or where the merits of the substance abuse evaluation will be used to satisfy a question raised a custody evaluator, "*ex parte*" consultation with client's family law attorney is not allowed.

13. Narratives - Summary findings written up in letter form documenting the nature and scope of the evaluation and the format used; the particulars of client history of substance use by classification, frequency, and outcomes; summary of mental health functioning highlighting both strengths and deficits; psychoactive substance abuse history in terms of the nomenclature - "use, abuse, addiction"; results of drug testing by laboratory; multi-axial diagnosis according to the Diagnostic & Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders - Fifth Edition - highlighting both psychoactive substance and/or mental health diagnostics, Axis IV stressors, and Axis V Global Assessment of Functioning; descriptions of current and previous functioning; description of mitigating or aggravating circumstances; description of family system dynamics; prognosis, and recommendations.
14. Review of Narrative - Evaluator will meet with client to review the draft report and answer questions. In some cases, modifications can be made; however, particulars germane to the evaluative process will not be suppressed, nor should client expect that modifications will be made because the Evaluator doesn't agree with the client with respect to findings.
15. Consent - Consent is required before the evaluation begins. Consent is also required to collaborate with the Laboratory. Additional consent is required to communicate with any other party - attorney, collateral, Court, Collaborative Divorce team, custody evaluator.
16. Consultation with Custody Evaluator - meeting in person or by telephone to discuss findings.