Frequently Asked Questions about Neuropsychology
For Providers and Referral Sources

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What is a neuropsychological evaluation?
The evaluation consists of an interview to gather relevant history, administration of
europsychological tests, feedback to patients and their family members, and a written report with detailed findings and recommendations, which is prepared for the patient and referring physician.
The tests are paper and pencil tests that have been developed to measure various cognitive functions such as attention, memory, language, visual spatial abilities, and memory.
Neuropsychological measures are based upon empirical findings and results are compared to published normative data. A patient's performance is compared to his/her peer group in order to determine areas of cognitive strength and weakness.

How is a neuropsychological evaluation different from a neurological exam?
A neurological exam assesses the integrity of the central nervous system. Motor, sensory, reflexes, and gait functions are examined. In contrast, higher order cognitive processes are examined in the neuropsychological evaluation. A neuropsychological evaluation can provide information not available from the neurological exam, which can be useful in terms of differential diagnosis, treatment planning, and prognosis. Neuropsychological testing in combination with neurological findings can often be used to maximize patient care and functioning.

What are some examples of referral questions?

Is the patient experiencing cognitive decline or dementia? Neuropsychological assessment is capable of detecting subtle cognitive deficits that are evident in the earliest stages of dementia. Early identification is important as patients benefit most from memory enhancement medications when these are started early in the course of the illness.

Does the patient have a learning disability or ADHD? Some individuals experience difficulties in school which can result in poor self esteem and failure to achieve at the level that would be expected given their intellectual abilities. In some cases, difficulties with learning may be due to either a learning disability or ADHD. By thoroughly assessing intellectual abilities, academic achievement skills, as well as cognitive functions such as memory and attention, a neuropsychological assessment can address this question. Further, because the results of the neuropsychological evaluation provide information concerning the patient's strengths and weaknesses, interventions and accommodations can be developed that are tailor-made to an individual's specific needs which in turn will promote maximal academic performance.

Has this patient demonstrated a decline in cognitive functioning over time? Serial or repeat testing can be used to assess whether the patient's cognitive functions have remained stable over time. This type of referral question is pertinent in cases of TBI or a progressive degenerative disorder.
Are the patient's memory impairments secondary to reversible conditions or an underlying neuropsychiatric or neurological disorder? A wide range of medical, psychological, and neurological factors can result in difficulties with memory and other thinking abilities. It is often complicated to determine what is causing a disruption in thinking abilities. For example, individuals with a history of TBI often experience depressed mood, which can impair memory functions, in addition to the brain injury sustained. In elderly individuals there are a wide range of medical conditions which can result in confusion and may be mistaken as evidence for dementia. Neuropsychological assessment can play an important role determining whether impairments in memory are secondary to reversible conditions such as depression or a metabolic disorder (which are often treatable) or an underlying neurological or neuropsychiatric condition.

Is this person able to drive safely, live independently, or make decisions about day-to-day affairs? Impairments in memory and other thinking abilities can impact judgment and decision making. Often, family members or physicians are concerned that an individual may not be able to care for themselves, drive, or make decisions regarding their healthcare or finances following either a brain injury or in cases of dementia. Results from empirical studies have shown that performance on neuropsychological tests of memory, problem solving, and planning are predictive of individual's abilities to carry out day-to-day activities, such as driving. Thus, a neuropsychological assessment can be helpful in those cases in which it is unclear whether a person can continue to live independently. Further, this allows the patient to have maximal autonomy and independence while ensuring his/her safety.

How can the results of a neuropsychological evaluation help my patients? Because neuropsychological tests have been developed to assess discrete cognitive functions and use normative data, a neuropsychological evaluation is particularly well suited for investigating these types of questions. The information gathered can be used to inform treatment planning, diagnosis, prognosis and decision making. A variety of environmental, behavioral and professionally based interventions can be offered based upon an individuals’ unique profile of cognitive strengths and weaknesses.

For example, results showing difficulties with encoding new information may suggest that a patient’s family member accompany him/her to all medical appointments to ensure that he/she is encoding all information discussed. The need to treat a reversible condition which is adversely impacting memory functions, such as depressed mood, may also become evident.

For individuals with learning disabilities, the results may suggest the need for strategies aimed at compensating for organizational and memory weaknesses to ensure that the individual is able to benefit from other interventions.
How long does an evaluation take to complete?

The length of time to complete the evaluation varies from patient to patient based upon the referral question and unique patient needs. Generally speaking, the interview, assessment, and feedback session can be completed within four hours and can be completed in one, two or three sessions. A report, containing all the findings, impressions, and recommendations, is prepared within a week following the evaluation and is sent to the patient, physician, and any other parties designated by the patient.

When possible and with the patient’s permission, it is preferable to have a family member or someone who is close with the patient present for the interview in order to gather collateral information.

The evaluation can be completed in one of our three office locations in Brick, Freehold or Manahawkin. In some instances, the evaluation can be completed at assisted living facilities if this is preferable to the patient and with the facility’s permission.

How can I receive additional information?

Dr. Wilder-Willis is currently in private practice in Red Bank, New Jersey. Arrangements can also be made to be seen at assisted living facilities. For clinically-related questions as well as additional information regarding services, scheduling and insurance, please call (732) 618-4950.

Dr. Wilder-Willis can also be reached via email at: neuro@wilder-willis.org.

About Dr. Kelly Wilder-Willis

Dr. Wilder-Willis is a clinical neuropsychologist specializing in the diagnosis and treatment planning of various neurological and neuropsychiatric disorders in adolescents, adults, and geriatrics. She has completed specialized training in neuropsychology and clinical psychology at the doctoral, internship and post-doctoral levels, in accordance with guidelines set forth for the practice of neuropsychology by the Clinical Neuropsychology Division of the American Psychological Association and the National Academy of Neuropsychology. She has been in private practice specializing in ADHD, learning disabilities, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), and dementia.

Dr. Wilder-Willis is currently accepting referrals for neuropsychological evaluations of adolescents, adults, and geriatric patients. In addition to clinical expertise, Dr. Wilder-Willis has authored several journal articles and presented at national conferences concerning the impact of cognitive dysfunction on daily functioning in various neuropsychiatric disorders.