

# Chapter 1

**Psychiatrist:** *A doctor who specializes in mental health, including substance use disorders. They are qualified to assess both the mental and physical aspects of psychological problems.*

## 1. Who are you?

My name is Dr. Amy Silverman and I'm a board-certified child and adult psychiatrist.

## 2. What does a psychiatrist do?

A psychiatrist evaluates for issues of a person's emotions or mood and behavior when they're out of whack. I need to figure out if there's medical or psychological issues that need to be addressed. This field combines science, knowledge, medicine, and taking care of and talking to people, and it emphasizes the importance of emotional connections. There are a lot of different choices in psychiatry. It's mostly therapy and medication treatment, but you can work in a hospital, a clinic, or through a school program, and you can change what you do or do several things at the same time. That's the unique thing about this job.

## 3. What is the hardest part of your job?

Right now, so many people are sad or anxious because of the life disruption with the pandemic. In general, I take on a lot of listening to people's problems and people feeling upset, and sometimes it takes a toll on me.

## 4. What is the most enjoyable part of your job?

I get to talk to people all day and learn about their lives. I'm able to help people feel significantly better through talking and medications, and I can watch the improvement. With kids, I can see them get back on track for development in school and socially. I get to see the direct effects of what I'm doing.

## 5. Describe your job in three words:

Connected, helpful, and fulfilling

**6. How long have you been a psychiatrist?**

I've been practicing for 17 years.

**7. Did you ever consider another profession?**

I considered being a rabbi, which is similar because I would still be talking to people to make them feel better. I also considered being a pediatrician in medical school.

**8. Is anyone else in your family in the medical field?**

No, I am the first one.

**9. What high school/college classes do you recommend?**

There are prerequisites for premed in college. As an intro into some of what is done, a basic psychology class would be a good starting point. I would also recommend taking a neuroscience course to learn about the brain and behavior more in depth. A statistics class would also be useful to learn to read and understand studies, and science classes in general are also helpful. Keep in mind that you don't have to major in science to be successful.

**10. What medical school did you go to?**

I went to Mount Sinai in NYC.

**11. What schooling did you do after college?**

I went to medical school for four years. Then I did a three year general adult residency in psychiatry with a little bit of child psychiatry. The residency was not like school because it was more on-the-job training and it felt more like I was actually working. Then I did a fellowship for another two years that was focused more towards child psychiatry, and this also felt like I was working and not in school.

**12. Where do you usually work?**

Right now I own a private office that I share with some friends, and I only go into the hospital about once a month for a little bit of consulting. When I first finished

training, I chose to work at a hospital for six years. I worked at an inpatient unit and I ran a day treatment program for new child psychiatry fellows. I still do some training, and I teach pediatricians how to prescribe medications in psychiatric cases.

**13. How many patients do you see on a daily basis?**

It varies. I spend about an hour with each patient, so I can see between 6-10 patients a day.

**14. How much flexibility do you have between your work life and home life?**

I have lots of flexibility now owning my own practice. When I worked at the hospital there were lots of hours every day and not a lot of flexibility.

**15. How is science used in your job?**

I need to use science to prescribe medications because I need to understand how they work in the brain. I also need to know about neurotransmitters since they are discussed a lot, and I need to be able to teach this knowledge to patients if I think they need it. Science is also a part of my job because I need to be able to make sure there are no medical diseases or illnesses causing psychiatric problems, I need to take patients' histories and send them for specific lab tests, I need to read lots of studies to keep up with the best methods of treating people, and I need to understand the statistics and science behind that research.

**16. Is research a big part of your job?**

I don't do research right now. I did do a little bit when I worked in the hospital where I read lots of research and studies. I can always do research if I'm interested in something though.

**17. How has the job changed since you started?**

The job has changed a lot for me since I started. I used to work in a hospital and it was a very serious environment. I would work with teens that were incredibly anxious about things like school or that had depression. Now I do more therapies

and outpatient treatment. I also used to teach fellows at residencies a lot more than I do now.

**18. How might AI or technological advances change your job in the future?**

Technology has changed a bit recently. I use different assessment technologies that can track people's moods and I communicate more electronically with patients. In the future, I hope that there'll be more technology to develop algorithms that'll help with the procedures in this job, like brain scanning to predict diagnoses if there's suspicious activity in certain areas of the brain.

**19. What things can people do to stay healthy in this area of medicine?**

You can't always avoid mental illnesses since stress affects mental health. The best thing to do is take good care of yourself to prevent more serious illnesses. Getting enough sleep, exercising, eating well, and having good and supportive connections with family and friends are all important factors to maintaining good mental health. Research shows that if you have a good support network, then stress can be better managed.

**20. What advice would you give to someone who wants to be a psychiatrist?**

Some advice I would give is to start practicing listening to people now. The main part of this job is being able to listen and hear how people understand the world. Working hard in school is also important. Taking lots of science classes in high school and college and keeping alert for studies about the brain and mental illness are good steps to take.