



## Human Service-Forensic Behavioral Health Practitioners: Roles and Responsibilities

By Jerrod Brown and Janina Cich

Human service-forensic behavioral health practitioners (HS-FBHPs) play a critical role at the nexus of the mental health and criminal justice systems. Although HS-FBHPs are typically unlicensed and hold a bachelor's degree (in some cases, master's degrees), these practitioners are often tasked with coordinating and providing a diverse array of assistance, referral, advocacy, intervention, and other forms of support and services for diverse populations of individuals involved in the criminal justice system who are often impacted by mental illness. The severity of criminal justice involvement of these clients can range from severe (e.g., prisoner re-entry and civil commitment) to less severe (e.g., probation or involvement with a problem-solving court). In light of the critical role played by HS-FBHPs, this article summarizes the settings where HS-FBHPs work, the agencies and different professionals who work with HS-FBHPs, and the roles and responsibilities of HS-FBHPs in the workplace.

Depending on their level of education, experience, and individual skill set, HS-FBHPs may be employed in a number of settings. This could include working in treatment settings such as inpatient and residential programs or psychiatric hospitals, local or state government agencies, nonprofit or community advocacy organizations, case management, domestic violence shelters, homeless outreach centers, correctional institutions, probation and parole offices, law enforcement agencies, and various other human service and criminal justice-related positions. In this capacity, HS-FBHPs often serve as a member of a multidisciplinary intervention and treatment team working alongside licensed mental health professionals and alcohol and drug counselors. This likely requires coordination with collaborators from housing, education, employment, medical, mental health, correctional halfway houses, and other

community organizations. Further, HS-FBHPs must be prepared to interact with professionals from legal (e.g., lawyers and judges) and corrections (e.g., probation and parole officers) settings along with first responders such as police officers, firefighters, paramedics, and emergency medical technicians. Throughout these interactions, HS-FBHPs must deftly employ a refined set of interpersonal and communication skills to work on behalf of their clients.

In these settings, HS-FBHPs are called upon to fill a number of roles and responsibilities in an effort to help criminal justice-involved individuals with mental illness to improve quality driven lives in the community. First, HS-FBHPs may be involved in the screening process of individuals with mental illness at different points in the criminal justice system (e.g., arrest, jail, trial, and prison, or community supervision). Second, HS-FBHPs often assist in the case management of these clients. This often involves connecting clients with mental health, substance use, and social services in the community and ensuring continuity of care. Third, HS-FBHPs frequently assist in the facilitation of classes focused on treatment and skill development such as healthy living, anger and stress management, parenting, and communication and social skills, as well as relapse prevention. Because clients can suffer from a combination of mental health (e.g., mood, post-traumatic stress disorder, and personality disorders), substance use (e.g., alcohol and drug misuse), and brain-based disorders (e.g., fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and traumatic brain injuries), HS-FBHPs could be called upon to teach, role-play and model skills, and coach these clients. Throughout these roles and responsibilities, HS-FBHPs typically work in conjunction with licensed mental health professionals to increase the likelihood of short- and long-term recovery of clients in the community.

As shown above, HS-FBHPs can play an important role in improving the overall lives of criminal justice-involved individuals who experience mental health-related challenges. That said, HS-FBHPs could benefit from advanced education in the area of human services with an emphasis in forensic behavioral health. Such education should focus on serious mental illness (e.g., schizophrenia, mood, and anxiety disorders), personality disorders (e.g., antisocial and borderline personality disorders), alcohol and substance use, trauma, intellectual and neurocognitive disorders (e.g., FASD), and traumatic brain injuries. Because all of these issues are disproportionately likely in individuals who become entangled in the criminal justice system, enhanced knowledge on these topics can help maximize the effectiveness of both HS-FBHPs and community-based resources.

## Biographies

**Jerrod Brown, M.A., M.S., M.S., M.S.**, is the Treatment Director for Pathways Counseling Center, Inc. Pathways provides programs and services benefiting individuals impacted by mental illness and addictions. Jerrod is also the founder and CEO of the American Institute for the Advancement of Forensic Studies (AIAFS), lead developer of an online Master of Arts in Human Services with an emphasis in Forensic Behavioral Health from Concordia University, St. Paul, Minnesota, and the Editor-in-Chief of Forensic Scholars Today (FST) and the Journal of Special Populations (JSP). Jerrod is currently in the dissertation phase of his doctorate degree program in psychology.

**Janina Cich, M.A.**, is a retired law enforcement officer with two decades of criminal justice experience. She is an adjunct criminal justice and forensic behavioral health professor and frequent lecturer. Janina conducts Crisis Intervention Training for law enforcement and mental health practitioners focusing on awareness, assessment, intervention, de-escalation techniques, and prevention approaches for mental health populations in the criminal justice systems. She currently serves as the Chief Operating Officer of the American Institute for the Advancement of Forensic Studies (AIAFS). She has co-authored several forensic mental health articles, serves on the peer review panel of Forensic Scholars Today (FST), and is Associate Editor of the Journal of Special Populations (JSP).