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Helping agencies be proactive about mental health and normalizing the use of mental health professionals.

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March 2024 Topic: Fitness-for-Duty Evaluations

What is a fitness-for-duty evaluation (FFDE)?

A psychological FFDE is an evaluation of one's fitness to perform their job functions safely and effectively. Unlike a pre-employment evaluation, FFDE's are conducted with established employees- not post-offer candidates or applicants. They are considered medical examinations under the ADA, so any related files should be kept apart from the employee's general personnel file.

What does my agency need to provide to initiate a FFDE referral?

You must provide objective evidence that a mental health issue might be present and interfere with job functioning. This cannot be merely speculative, but rather from direct observation or from a third-party report. I will also request a copy of the employee's job description, as well as any relevant records for the employee (e.g., supervisor concerns, performance reviews).

Examples of referrals:

- Employee provided documentation to supervisor of recent psychiatric hospitalization for depression and suicidal ideation.
- Employee left a shift early due to experiencing a panic attack, and then called in sick the next day due to reported anxiety over working.
- Your agency takes a statement from an employee's spouse alleging employee is experiencing suicidal ideation and is domestically violent.

What can a FFDE conclude about an employee?

The FFDE report provides an opinion about an employee's fitness- usually in terms of "fit" or "unfit" for duty. If requested, the psychologist can provide opinions regarding work restrictions, accommodations, or interventions; but these are ultimately decisions made by the employer (not the examiner).

If found "unfit," reconsideration or reevaluation may be indicated when an employee provides information suggesting fitness has been restored. For example, an employee attended psychological treatment of some sort.

Similar to a pre-employment evaluation, a FFDE does not provide a mental health diagnosis, but rather assesses if mental health functioning will interfere with one's ability to perform their job functions in a safe and effective manner.

Do employees need a FFDE if they were involved in a critical incident?

The short answer is no, because an officer's fitness is presumed to remain intact unless you have evidence to the contrary. In other words, you cannot initiate a FFDE solely due to involvement in a shooting or critical incident.

Looking for more information?

Email me at Shawna@BaronPsych.com for help writing or updating your FFDE policy, or learning more about the services I provide (pre-employment evaluations, critical incident debriefings, FFDE's, mental health check-ins, etc).



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