

# **Tackling** Head Injuries & **Concussions:** The Diverse Life of a Neuropsychologist

Felicia Connor, Psy.D., ABPP

Natashia Brown, Ph.D., CAS



# Disclosures

- No disclosures for Felicia Connor, Natasha Brown, and NFN Brain Connections.

# What is a Psychologist

---

Professional trained in the study of human thought, emotion and behavior.

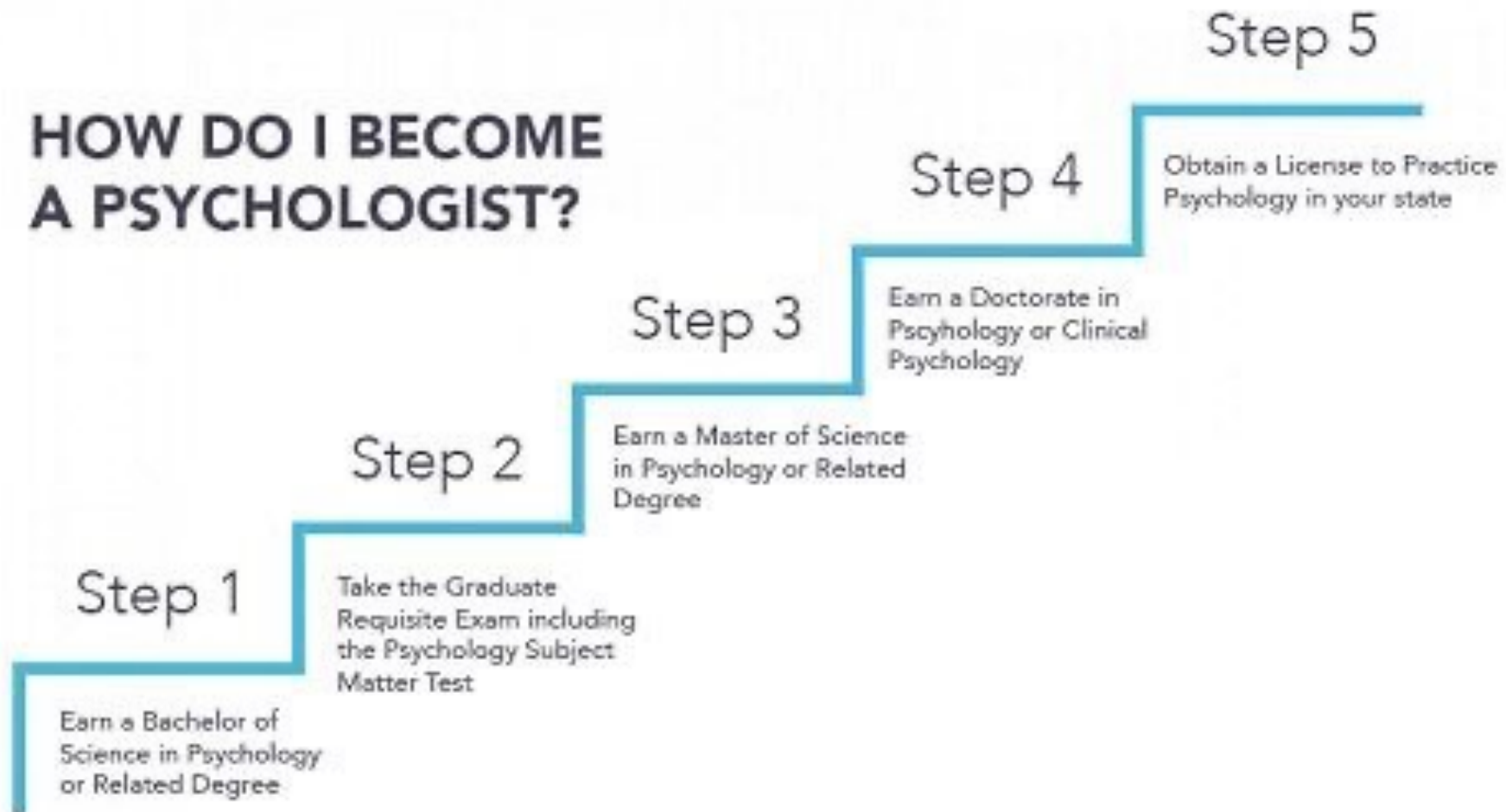
---

Roles include: Clinician, Researcher, Professor and Consultant.

---

Most Neuropsychologists are trained first as a Clinical or Counseling Psychologist.

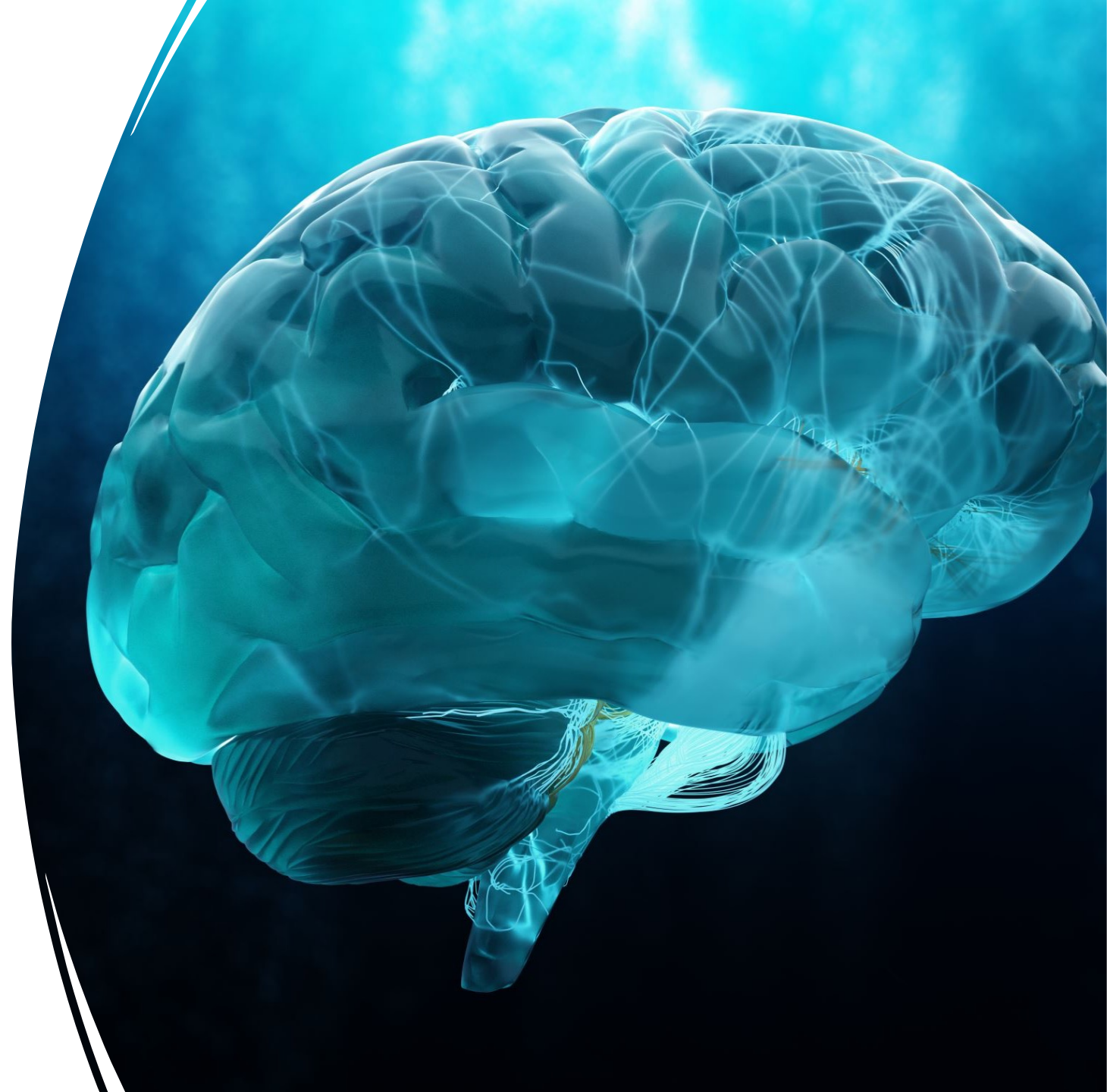
# HOW DO I BECOME A PSYCHOLOGIST?



# What is a Neuropsychologist?

---

A psychologist with special expertise in the relationships between the brain and behavior.

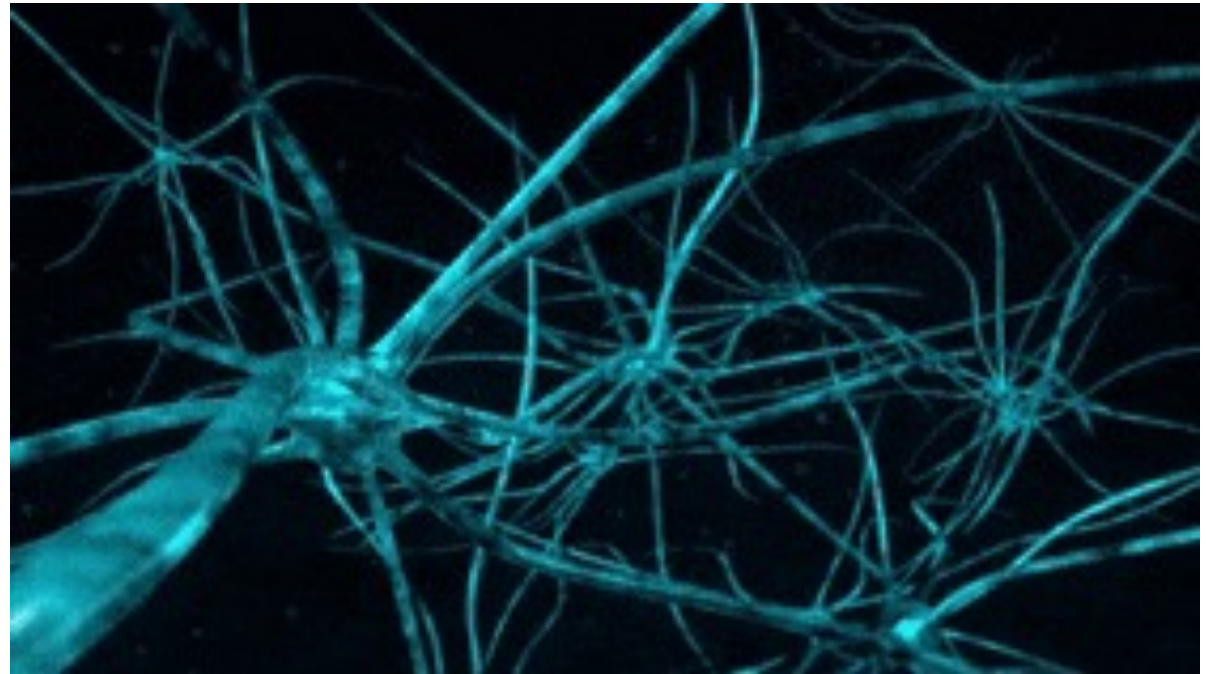


# Specialty of: Neuropsychology

- Neuropsychology is one of many Specialty areas in Psychology.

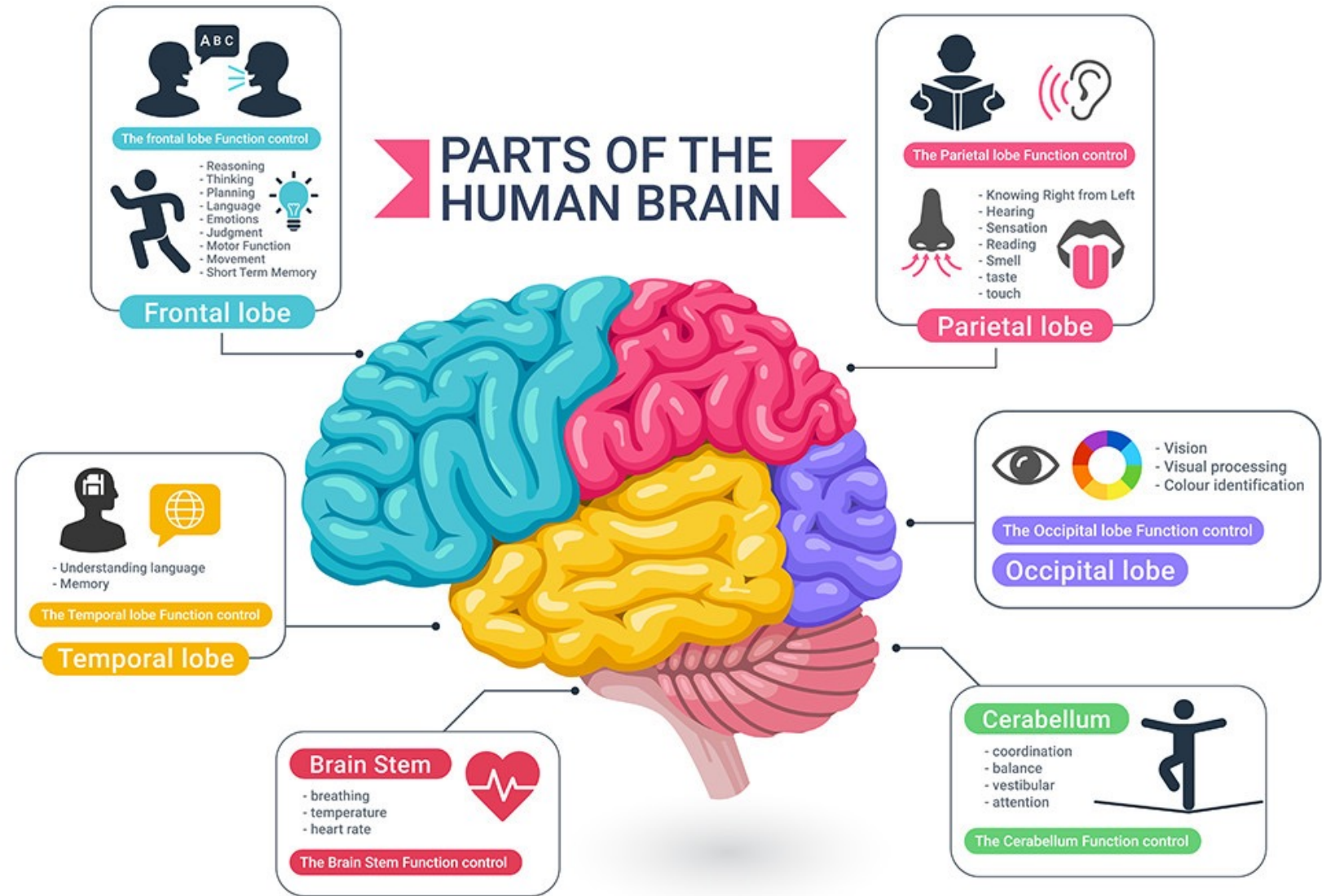
Related Specialties include:

- Health Psychology
- Rehabilitation Psychology
- School Psychology
- Forensic Psychology

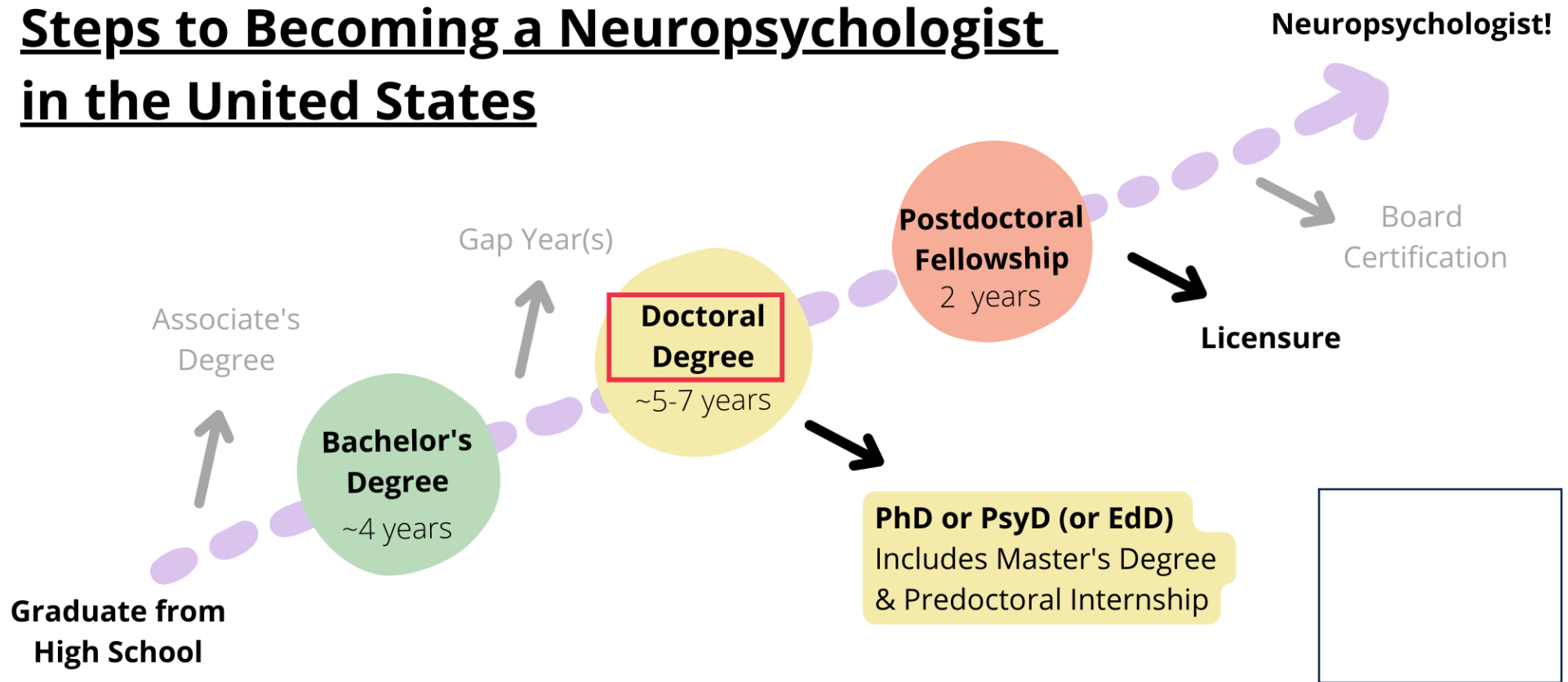


# What Do Neuropsychological Tests Measure?

---



# Steps to Becoming a Neuropsychologist in the United States





# Work Activities

---

Assessment, Diagnosis,  
Interventions

---

Evaluate a person's thinking skills,  
emotional/behavioral functioning.

---

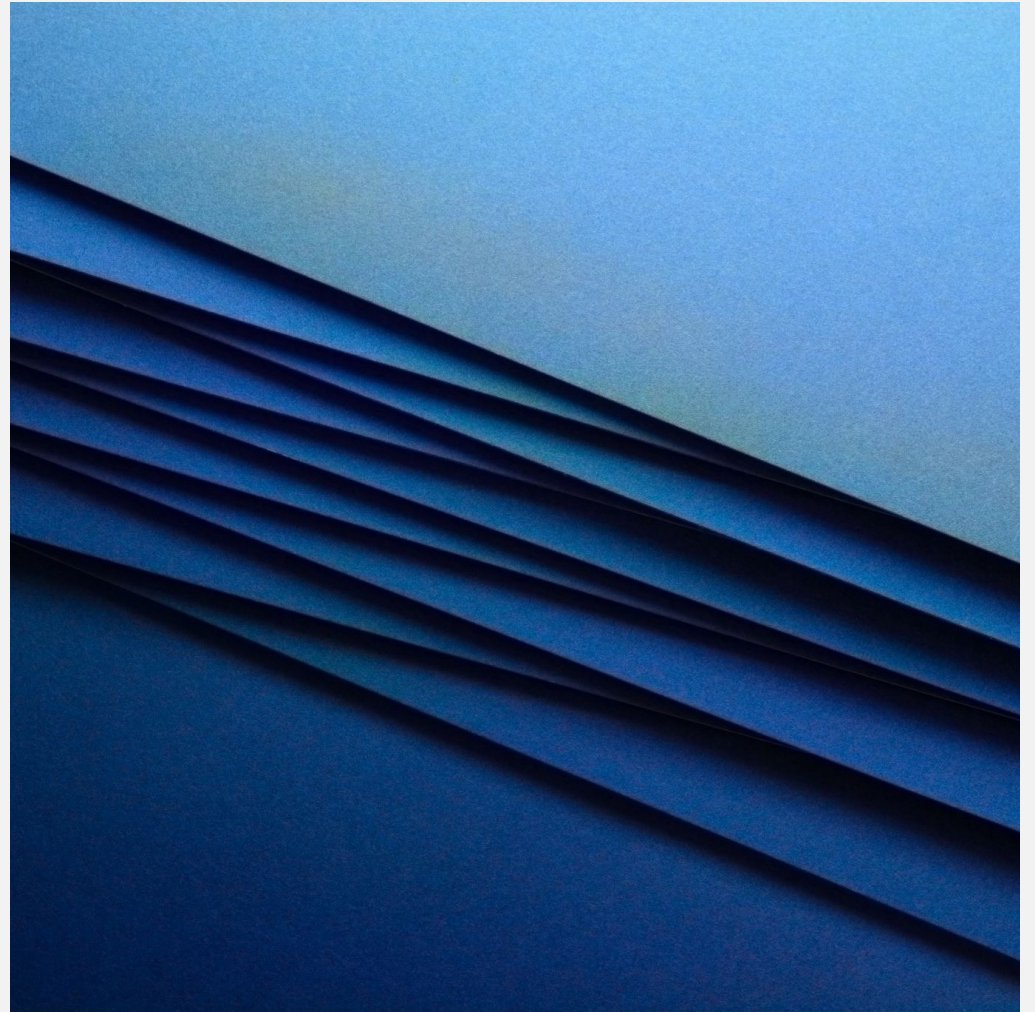
Provide recommendations to the  
patient and their family.



# Work Settings

Hospitals, Clinics, Private Practice,  
Schools, VA/Military, Sports  
Medicine, Forensics/Legal Settings

Most work within Multidisciplinary  
teams and have collaborative  
relationships.

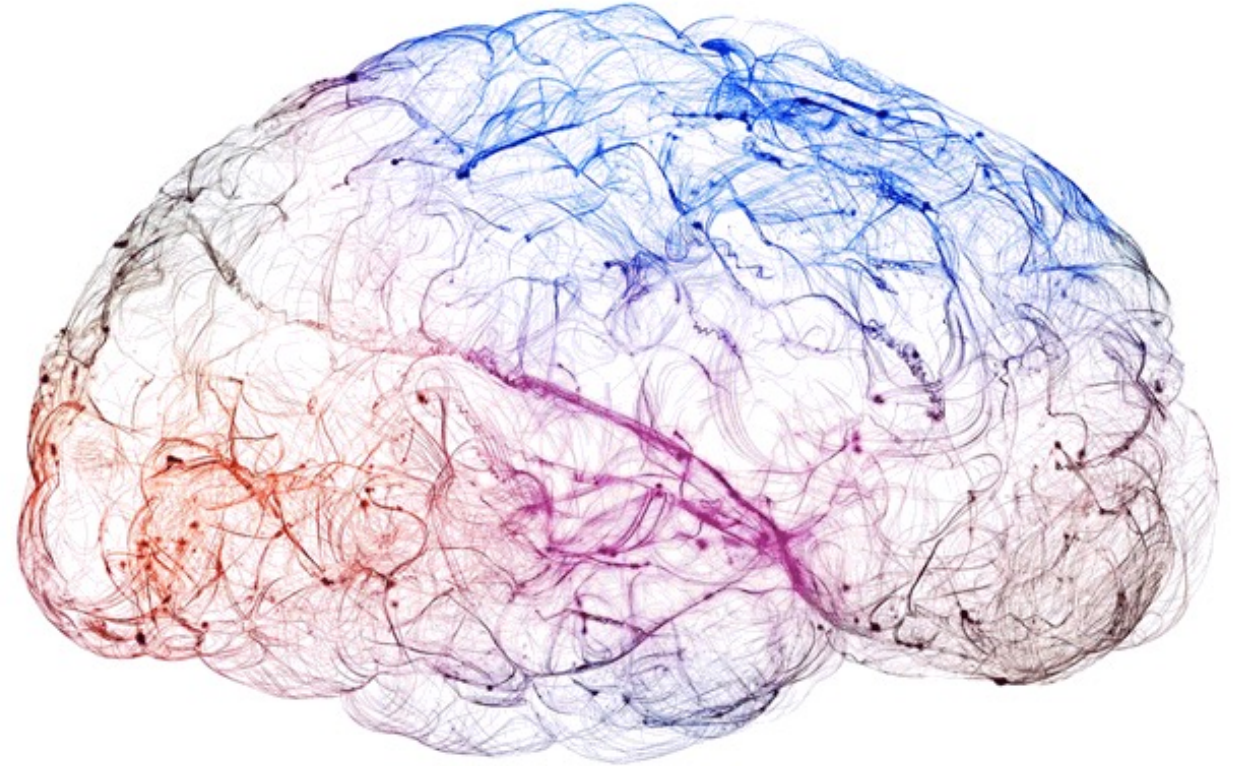


# Populations We Serve

---

Neuropsychologists can specialize in:

- Neurodevelopmental/Pediatric Populations
- Geriatric Populations
- Conditions Across the Lifespan (i.e. Concussion, Traumatic Brain Injury, Stroke, Multiple Sclerosis, Cerebral Palsy, Seizure Disorder/Epilepsy, Other Genetic/Developmental Disorders)





# Populations We Serve

- Athletics (e.g. Soccer Players, NFL)
- Forensics (e.g. Car Accident, Capital Punishment Cases).
- Military (e.g. Active and Retired Service Members)
- Aviation (e.g. Airplane Pilots)
- Education (e.g. Special Education)

# Who This Job is a Good Fit For?

---



- Intellectual Curiosity
- Enjoys investigating a problem and finding solutions
- Comfortable with sharing stories in written form
- Detailed Oriented
- Creative
- Likes interacting with people
- Organized
- Enjoys collaborating with others
- Open to life long learning

# How Long Was My Journey?



- 12 Years of Primary and Secondary School
- 4 Years of college at Johnson C. Smith University
- 5 Years in Graduate School at American School of Professional Psychology
- 3 Year Long Practicums (Training)
- 1 Year in a Doctoral Level Internship at
- 2 Years in Fellowship (Holcomb Behavioral Health, A.I. duPont Children's Hospital)
- Take License Exam to Practice Psychology

# Day in the Life of a Neuropsychologist: Inpatient Hospital

- **8 am** Review Admissions List, Assign cases to Neuropsychologist and Interns
  - **8:30** Morning Meeting with all staff (OT, PT, SLP, Medical, Horticulture, Art Therapy) working on the unit
  - **9:00-10:30** Clinical Meeting with head of all disciplines to review treatment/discharge planning.
  - **10:30-12:00** Start seeing clients in 40-60 minute intervals (individual & family therapy, cognitive remediation, neuropsychological assessment)
  - **12:00** Lunch
  - **1:00** Start seeing clients in 40-60 minute intervals
  - **4:00** Finish seeing client (see 4-8 clients per day)
- \*Do notes, run groups, review medical charts, and collaborate with staff throughout the day

# Day in the Life of a Neuropsychologist: Outpatient Hospital

---

- 4:30 am Wake Up and Get Dressed
- 5:30 am Drive to Wilmington DE Train Station
- 6:15 am Take the Train to NYC
- 7:50 am Arrive in NYC
- 8:15 am Arrive to NYU Hospital (Walk 25 mins)
- 9:00-9:50 am See first Patient of the day
- 10:00 – See next Patient (Cognitive Coaching)
- 11:30 -4:00 Neuropsychological Testing
- 4:00- 5:30 Score Test Measures
- 5:45 Leave NYU Hospital – Walk 25 min to Train Station
- 6:15 Take Train back to Wilmington DE
- 8:20 Arrive to car, Drive Home
- 8:50 Arrive home





# Day in the Life of a Neuropsychologist: Private Practice

- 9-10:30 Clinical Interview with Retired NFL Player
  - 10:30-10:45 Break
  - 10:45-12:30 Testing
  - 12:30-1:30 Lunch
  - 1:30-6:30 Testing
  - 6:30- 7:15 Collateral Interview
- \* Collateral Interview may occur on different days; review records, 2-3 days of scoring/report writing

# Concussion

---



# What is a Concussion ?

- 1) Hitting your head
- 2) Head forcefully and quickly moves back and forth without hitting something
  - Car accident
  - Being in a blast zone during an explosion





---

## What Actions Cause A Concussion

- Playing sports (soccer, snowboarding, hockey)
  - Heading a soccer ball
  - Being hit in the head by a football
  - Suddenly being thrown into the air
  - Hitting one's head on the ground
  - Being tackled
  - Being punched

# What Actions Cause A Concussion?

- Car or bike accident
- Military blast
- Being hit in the head with an object
- Slipping on ice
- Having a fight
- Falling down stairs

# Your Brain During A Concussion



# Pediatric Concussion Case

- 14- Year Old Girl
- History of ADHD (diagnosed in grade school); Anxiety
- A/B Student, Runs Track, Social
- First concussion- Struck by a deer on side of the road
- Second concussion- Hit ground
- No Previous Concussions
- Neuropsychological Testing to assess attention, concentration, memory, visual spatial skills, thinking speed, executive functioning

# Presenting Concerns

Physical Complaints: chronic headaches (especially when stressed and working on her computer); occasional neck pain, blurry vision; noise sensitivity

Cognitive Complaints: difficulty focusing on reading for school, feeling “slow to learn” new materials from teacher and books, forgetful (grocery shopping, school assignments), feeling overwhelmed and confused when multiple people are talking



# Presenting Concerns

Emotional Complaints:  
easily frustrated, more  
irritable, sadness,  
nervousness, tearfulness,  
avoidance of things they  
use to enjoy

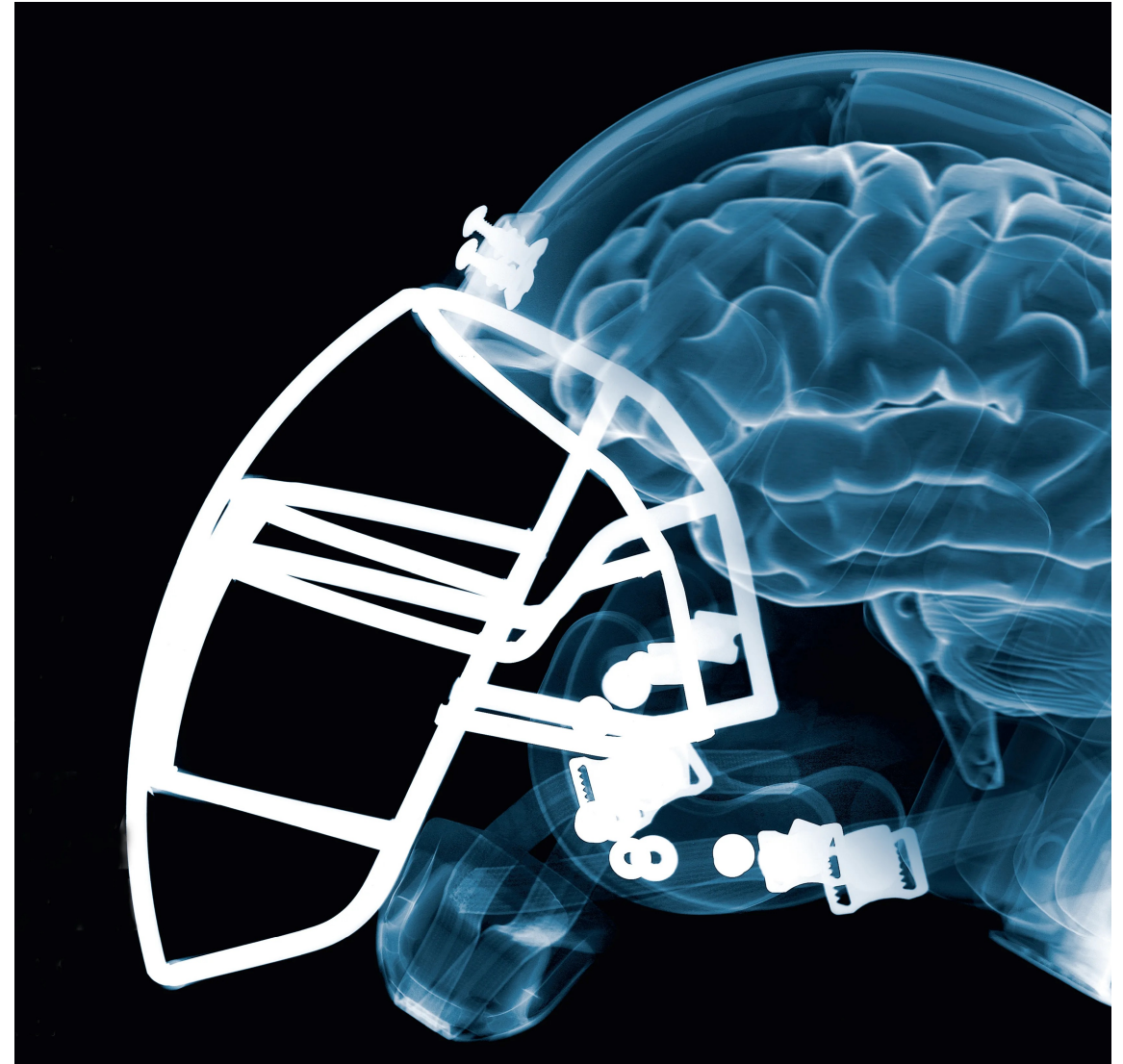
Sleep Complaints: Difficulty  
falling, staying asleep,  
tiredness and low energy  
throughout the day



# NFL Concussion Case

# History

- History: Played for NFL for 6 years following college (Tight End)
- Retired and working in real estate management (part-time)
- Lives with wife and 2 adult children (live outside of the home)
- Previous Concussions: At least 6 (high school, NFL)
- Partner reports: road rage incidents, needing reminders to do household tasks, requires grocery list for shopping, gets lost when traveling outside of neighborhood
- NFL Player Reports: occasional incontinence, headaches, chronic pain, anxiety when driving, episodes of sadness and crying, worried his co-workers were noticing changes in his memory, difficulty staying asleep





- Behavioral Observations: On measures of processing speed and more difficult tasks; Client was frustrated and disappointed in himself
- Neuropsychological Testing to assess attention, concentration, memory, visual spatial skills, thinking speed, executive functioning for a full day

A small green seedling with several leaves is growing out of a crack in a dark, textured surface, likely asphalt. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light color.

# Recommendations

---

- Cognitive remediation/cognitive coaching to provide strategies for improving memory, managing frustration tolerance, improving focus so he could take in new information.
- Psychotherapy: Provide coping skills for managing sleep, anxiety, sadness, adjustment to long-term impact of concussion on everyday life

# When to Seek Out a Neuropsychologist

---

- Concussion Symptoms that persist beyond 3 months
- Daily activities are harder to do:
  - School (e.g. difficulty paying attention in class)
  - Work (e.g. unable to finish work responsibilities)
  - Daily household tasks (e.g. forgetting to walk the dog, chores)
  - Sports (e.g. forgetting football plays)
  - Driving (e.g. heightened anxiety, difficulty focusing, slower reaction time)



# What a Neuropsychologist Can Do For You

---

- Tailored comprehensive assessment to identify your strengths and weaknesses
  - Virtual
  - In Person
- Cognitive Coaching
  - Creating tailored strategies for school, work, home, athletics
    - Group
    - Individual
- Consultation
  - Legal
  - Education
  - Family

