



Spotlight On Petros Levounis, MD, Newark, NJ

Dr. Levounis is Professor and Chair, Department of Psychiatry, and Associate Dean, Rutgers New Jersey Medical School and Chief of Service, University Hospital, Newark, NJ.

What is your specialty (and, if applicable, subspecialty or other more focused area) expertise?

I am board-certified in psychiatry, addiction psychiatry, and addiction medicine, and my academic work has focused on the psychotherapy and psychopharmacology of addiction and co-occurring other psychiatric disorders, medical student education, LGBTQ+ mental health, and the behavioral addictions.



What is your current or, in your career, most predominant clinical practice setting?

I have always maintained a small outpatient private practice seeing patients who use substances or may have a behavioral addiction—these days mostly concerning a potential addiction to social media. Gay men who use crystal methamphetamine and people struggling with relationship issues have often come to see me for advice and treatment. I have also greatly enjoyed seeing patients with severe psychiatric disorders in our Inpatient Psychiatric Unit on Thursday mornings during the Chair's Teaching Rounds.

What else can you tell us about your current or significant past roles in your field?

As chair of the department of Psychiatry at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School for the past 12 years, I have been fortunate to work with incredible faculty and staff who offer state-of-the-art inpatient, outpatient, and emergency psychiatric services from birth to old age. The Rutgers NJMS low-barrier addiction treatment clinic is legendary in Northern New Jersey communities. Our Center of Excellence reaches beyond our campus facilities to help people in need of addiction and other mental health services. Our van meets “people where people are at” from Newark Penn Station to faith-based buildings. Most recently, we have been exploring opportunities to further expand our outreach work to beauty salons and barber shops, which are often a primary source of mental health counseling for our patients.

Please tell us your thoughts about the role and importance of ABPN board certification.

The American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology offers its diplomates, the hospitals and clinics where we work, our patients, and the general public the most definitive nod that a physician who treats psychiatric and/or neurological disorders has been thoroughly vetted by a credible institution in the

House of Medicine. Ultimately, it is a matter of trust, and ABPN has earned people's trust for over 90 years.

What have your experiences been like in your interactions with the ABPN as a candidate or as a diplomate?

Back in the day when we had the ABPN Part II oral exams, I was honored to be an examiner in Jay Scully's team. What an amazing experience! The responsibility to the candidates, but also to their future patients, made us examine each psychiatrist's candidacy with great diligence and sense of duty. I remember learning from the late Arthur Meyerson how to distinguish a competent but nervous candidate from someone who "was not there yet" as he would say. Jay taught me the art of treating candidates with impeccable integrity but also ample warmth. I am deeply indebted to my ABPN mentors from those early years in my career.

Do you have any other perspectives you'd like to share with us?

I would like to bring up loneliness, which is emerging as a key concern for more people than ever before. It's easy to blame technology in general—and social media more specifically—for this alarming increase, but the research is far from conclusive about such a connection. However, if someone is neglecting face-to-face relationships or notice that Candy Crush Saga distracts them from work or school, it may be time to reconsider their relationship with social media and Internet gaming.

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