

### **WORKSHOP 3: WHEN LIFE DEPENDS ON A PIECE OF PAPER: THE ROLE OF MENTAL HEALTH WORKERS IN COMPLETING GOVERNMENT PAPERWORK FOR REFUGEES**

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#### Background:

For immigrants and refugees in the United States, obtaining US citizenship is a landmark event that symbolizes long-term safety for themselves and their families, thus accelerating the healing process. For some, mental illness may impair the ability to pass the citizenship examination, potentially prolonging a period of instability. In such cases, physicians or psychologists can complete US government form N-648 requesting exemption from the exam. Presenters, including psychiatrists, a case manager, and an attorney, who have worked with over 50 patients on the exemption process, will discuss what is at stake for patients, providers, and customs officers. Participants will be given real life case vignettes, decide whether to fill out the form, practice filling it out, and problem-solve around common reasons for rejection in a climate that has become less friendly towards newcomers.

#### Aims/Objectives/Issues of Focus:

Participants will become familiar with the N-648 form, learn to assess appropriateness for application, practice completion of the form, and explore the benefits of collaboration with case management and legal representation. Additionally, they will understand the ethical dilemmas and countertransference that may be elicited in providers during this process.

### Methods/Proposition:

The workshop will utilize case vignettes to facilitate experiential activities outlining the decision-making process in determining appropriateness for application for exemption, completion of the N-648, and the benefit of a collaborative model.

### Results/Potential Outcomes:

Participants will gain understanding and experience with assessment for and completion of the N-648 form utilizing collaboration with case management and legal representation.

### Discussion/Implications:

The implications for patient's failing to complete the naturalization process are substantial, including prolonged separation from family, loss of government benefits, and fear of deportation. For professionals providing care for these patients, competency in managing requests for completion of the N-648 in a manner that accurately conveys clinical data and meets government standards is paramount.

### Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this workshop, participants will be able to:

1. Participants will be able to analyze appropriateness of application for exemption from U.S. citizenship exam requirements and identify countertransference issues that may be elicited in this process.
2. Participants will be able to accurately and effectively formulate concerns regarding a refugee's inability to participate in aspects of the citizenship exam requirements in a manner that meets the standards of review by USCIS.

### References

Herman, J. L. (1992a). *Trauma and recovery*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.uscis.gov/>