

Case Vignettes

Case 1

Ms. G is a forty-six-year-old Caucasian female charged with burglary. She was arrested for the offense after she was found by the police with her neighbor's property. She was intoxicated and in possession of drugs at the time of the arrest. She also was belligerent and combative and surprised that she was being accused of a crime. She initiated a physical altercation with the police and was immediately taken into custody with the highest level of constraint to protect her and the officers from potential harm. The officers' report indicated that Ms. G was irritable, assaultive, hyperactive, and irrational when they approached her. She was also unable to engage in conversation and believed the officers were attempting to poison her. Her energy level was excessively high, and she emphatically stated that she knew the mayor personally and would have the officers and prosecutor incarcerated for accusing her of this crime. She refused defense counsel and insisted on speaking to the judge before her pretrial. While incarcerated, she rallied the other inmates to protest the rules and initiated a hunger strike. She became more paranoid while in the holding cell, suggesting that the police planted drugs on her and were attempting to locate and kill her only remaining family member. They were, in fact, attempting to contact her brother to gather information on her mental health. Her brother provided them with relevant family history. He indicated that Ms. G had lost her parents at an early age and was separated from her brother when they went into foster care. Her brother had had minimal contact with her from the time she was four years old until she turned eighteen and found him with the help of a private investigator. They maintained only intermittent contact because Ms. G was transient, moving around the country on a regular basis. She held odd jobs, sold drugs, and lived with boyfriends to survive. To her brother's knowledge, Ms. G had never received any mental health treatment. She also denied a history treatment. She refused to speak with the police about her charges and personal history.

Ms. G faces a trial for her offense because she refused a plea bargain. She also refused defense counsel when it was offered.

Determine what type of forensic assessment would be most appropriate for this case and discuss the rationale for your decision.

Your choices are:

- Competency to stand trial
- Substance abuse evaluation
- Not guilty by reason of insanity
- Mental health treatment evaluation

Case 2

Mr. P is a twenty-six-year-old single male charged with his fourth driving under the influence (DUI). He was arrested while parked in his car in front of his apartment. His blood alcohol level was just over the legal limit, and he passed most of the sobriety tests given by the officer who arrested him. During the arrest, he stated that he had returned from a going-away party for a friend and was so tired he fell asleep in his car before he was able to make it into his apartment. He admitted to drinking that evening but denied with certainty that

he was intoxicated. His story was convincing to the officer, but his previous history of DUIs warranted the arrest. Mr. P was pleasant and cooperative during the arrest and was taken into custody without incident. He was released the next day with a court date. He obtained legal defense and faced the judge with both fear that he would be incarcerated and confidence that he had a defensible case. Much to his surprise, the judge imposed a harsh sentence—ninety-day substance use treatment—at the corrections facility. Mr. P has never been incarcerated and faces losing his job if he spends ninety days in treatment. The judge did not show him any leniency or take into consideration his position in the community, his clean criminal background, or the eight-year time span between his last and present DUI charges. Mr. P disclosed to his lawyer that his father was an alcoholic and that there is a long history of alcohol and drug abuse in his family. He also indicated that his mother was schizophrenic and he was responsible for much of her care during his formative years. He became a successful operations manager for a software engineering company at an early age and is on the fast track to becoming a shareholder within the next two years if he maintains a clear record and follows company policy. He admitted to a bout of depression in college following the placement of his mother in a nursing home. He denied a history of depression prior to that point in time but admitted that his past circumstances likely made him susceptible to emotional difficulty. He began drinking at fourteen years of age to deal with the stress of his mother's illness and his responsibility for her. His use increased during the one year in college when he was depressed. He received the initial two of his three previous DUIs on campus that year. His third DUI was the result of driving home after having a drink to celebrate passing a difficult examination. The police in his college town were known to make a high number of drunken driving arrests that were rarely fought in court. He believes that he was simply prey for the police and denied he was irresponsible with drinking and driving.

Mr. P admitted to recent work stress that likely threatened his position and future with the company. He denied feeling depressed or the urge to use alcohol to reduce his stress.

Mr. P has been depressed and used alcohol excessively in the past when he faced stress and difficulty. He also denies the seriousness of the charges against him.

Determine what type of forensic assessment would be most appropriate for this case and discuss the rationale for your decision.

Your choices are:

- Competency to stand trial
- Substance abuse evaluation
- Not guilty by reason of insanity
- Mental health treatment evaluation

Case 3

Mr. H has been charged with second-degree murder as a result of shooting a man in his apartment complex for playing loud music night after night. He admitted to killing the man and expressed remorse but felt justified in his murder because he had made so many previous requests to his neighbor to turn down his music. During questioning, Mr. H revealed that on the night of the shooting, he was instructed by the God of his universe to exterminate the noise that disturbed the angels. It was at that point when he loaded his rifle and went upstairs to kill his neighbor. The suspect is twenty-four years old with no former mental health history. He was able to discuss his past development with the detective working on the case. He presented with no hostility or irrational thoughts. He related that his development in his family was relatively uneventful

and that he had close relationships with both his mother and father and with his two younger siblings, one brother and one sister. He had recently moved into his own apartment, after graduating from college, and is receiving support from his mother until he finds work. His father died two years ago in a tragic car accident. He felt guilty for moving but also wanted to be independent and begin his career. The suspect admitted to hearing voices on one other occasion when he was driving his car to the grocery store about one year ago. He assumed it was he himself who was talking to himself and never gave it another thought. He began to apparently feel more remorse as the interview proceeded, but the investigator was uncertain that it was genuine and wondered if he was being manipulated by the suspect. The investigator returned him to his cell to await further questioning and formal charges.

Mr. H faces murder charges and is not clearly presenting with remorse. He has experienced recent losses and changes that have resulted in an increase in stress and responsibility.

Mr. H has also begun to experience auditory hallucinations, which he indicated provoked him to shoot his neighbor.

Determine what type of forensic assessment would be most appropriate for this case and discuss the rationale for your decision.

Your choices are:

- Competency to stand trial
- Substance abuse evaluation
- Not guilty by reason of insanity
- Mental health treatment evaluation