

The Quest for a Science of Clinical Psychology: A Progress Report

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As a pioneer in the scientific study of clinical science, Richard McFall is in a unique position to speak on the state of science in clinical psychology. That state, he said, has seen brighter times. McFall, the recipient of this year's Distinguished Scientist Award from the Society for the Science of Clinical Psychology (SSCP), made his remarks in his award address at the APS 18th Annual Convention.

"The scientific foundations of clinical psychology within the field generally are eroding," said McFall, Indiana University. He cited a large increase in the number of doctor of psychology, or PsyD, degrees awarded in recent years. PsyD programs tend to de-emphasize research in favor of trusting clinical judgment, McFall said. "And we know about the research on clinical judgment."

Over the same period, enrollment in research-oriented PhD programs has remained steady instead of increasing at the same rate as PsyD programs. But all is not lost, McFall pointed out. Some clinical psychology subgroups have continued to follow an empirical model. In addition, Indiana's hybrid training model allows doctoral students to study both clinical science and a second specialization, such as cognitive science.

This dual training enables new clinical psychologists to "stand toe to toe with somebody in one of these other fields and hold their own," McFall said.