

HOSPITAL PHYSICIAN®

EMERGENCY MEDICINE BOARD REVIEW MANUAL

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Psychiatric Disorders in the Emergency Department

Series Editor: Gus M. Garmel, MD, FACEP

Associate Program Director

Stanford/Kaiser Emergency Medicine Residency Program

Senior Staff Emergency Physician, Permanente Medical Group

Kaiser Permanente Medical Center, Santa Clara, CA

Assistant Clinical Professor of Emergency Medicine (Surgery)

Stanford University School of Medicine, Stanford, CA

Contributing Author: Pamela J. Stuart, MD, FACEP

Medical Director

California Emergency Physicians Medical Group

Department of Emergency Medicine, St. Louise Regional Hospital, Gilroy, CA

CA Medical Director

South Valley Family and Occupational Health Center, Gilroy, CA

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Psychiatric Disorders in the Emergency Department

I. INTRODUCTION

Patients with psychiatric complaints commonly present to the emergency department (ED). The prevalence of psychiatric illness in patients presenting to the ED is 38%. This rate varies over a 24-hour period, increasing to 56% after midnight and decreasing to 20% during the day. Psychiatric illness may be the primary reason for the ED visit, but it is often a secondary reason. The challenges to the emergency physician are to determine the patient's physiologic and psychiatric status and to address any underlying medical conditions needing care. Emergency physicians must rapidly assess, intervene, and provide treatment and support for the patient with a psychiatric disorder while ensuring a safe environment for the patient, the ED staff, and themselves. This manual presents an approach to evaluating and treating patients with psychiatric complaints and discusses psychiatric disorders commonly encountered in the ED.

II. CLASSIFICATION CRITERIA FOR MENTAL DISORDERS

- A. **DSM-IV.** The definition and classification of psychiatric illness is based on the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th edition (DSM-IV). The DSM-IV uses a multiaxial system in which each axis describes a domain of information. It is important for emergency physicians to have a working knowledge of this system in order to
1. Appropriately diagnose and treat patients
 2. Communicate effectively with other practitioners who become involved in the care of the patient

3. Provide the documentation necessary for patient records
- B. **Multiaxial system**
1. **Axis I: Clinical disorders**
 - a. Organic brain syndromes
 - 1) Delirium
 - 2) Dementia
 - 3) Substance-related disorders
 - a) Intoxication
 - b) Withdrawal syndromes
 - 4) Mental disorders due to general medical condition
 - b. Major psychiatric disorders
 - 1) Schizophrenia
 - 2) Mood disorders
 - a) Major depression
 - b) Bipolar disorder
 - 3) Anxiety disorders
 - a) Panic disorder
 - b) Phobias
 - 4) Somatoform disorders, including conversion reactions
 - 5) Eating disorders
 - 6) Sleep disorders
 - 7) Sexual and gender identity disorders
 - 8) Dissociative disorders
 2. **Axis II: Personality disorders**
 - a. Antisocial (ie, malingering)
 - b. Paranoid
 - c. Histrionic
 - d. Borderline
 - e. Dependent
 - f. Obsessive-compulsive
 - g. Schizoid
 - h. Schizotypal
 - i. Narcissistic
 - j. Avoidant