

# Recognizing Signs and Symptoms of Mental Illnesses

State of Georgia  
Crisis Intervention Team  
Training Program

# Recognizing Signs and Symptoms of Mental Illnesses

# Overview

- Part 1: Signs, Symptoms, Syndromes, and Diagnoses
- Part 2: S/S Involving Mood/Affect/Emotion
- Part 3: S/S Involving Thinking
- Part 4: S/S Involving Senses/Perceptions or Beliefs
- Part 5: S/S of Anxiety
- Part 6: Miscellaneous S/S
- Part 7: Case Stories

# Recognizing Signs and Symptoms of Mental Illnesses

Part 1.

Signs, Symptoms,  
Syndromes, and Diagnoses

# Signs

- “Objective findings observed by the clinician”
- Things that you observe that indicate something is not right
- Example: abnormality on an EKG
- Example: high level of glucose in the blood
- Example: a tight, red eardrum
- Example: flat affect

# Symptoms

- “Subjective experiences described by the patient”
- Things that the patient reports as problems
- Example: chest pain
- Example: frequent urination
- Example: pain in the ear, difficulty hearing
- Example: hearing voices talking when there is really no one there

# Syndromes

- “A group of signs and symptoms that occur together as a recognizable condition, that may be less specific than a clear-cut disorder or disease”
- A cluster of signs and symptoms
- Example: heart attack
- Example: diabetes
- Example: ear infection
- Example: psychosis

# Diagnoses

- Formal names for disease states
- A more specific terminology for a syndrome
- Example: acute myocardial infarction
- Example: type II diabetes mellitus
- Example: otitis media
- Example: schizophrenia, paranoid type

# Signs, Symptoms, Syndromes, and Diagnoses

<i>Sign</i>	<i>Symptom</i>	<i>Syndrome</i>	<i>Diagnosis</i>
Abnormal EKG	Chest pain	Heart attack	Acute Myocardial Infarction
Elevated glucose in the blood	Frequent urination	Diabetes	Type II Diabetes Mellitus
Tight, red eardrum	Pain in the ear	Ear infection	Otitis Media
Flat affect	Hearing voices	Psychosis	Schizophrenia, Paranoid Type

# Part 1. Quiz Question #1

- You are called to the home of a woman who is having suicidal thoughts. When you arrive, she states that she has had insomnia for a week and feels nervous.
- “Insomnia” and “feeling nervous” are...
- A. Signs
- B. Symptoms
- C. Syndromes
- D. Diagnoses

# Part 1. Quiz Question #2

- You sit down with her to learn more about how you can help. She says that she has a history of depression and feels like she is going back into another episode.
- In this example, “depression” is a...
  - A. Sign
  - B. Symptom
  - C. Syndrome
  - D. Diagnosis

# Part 1. Quiz Question #3

- While you are talking to her, she shows you some paperwork from her outpatient doctor. The paperwork mentions “major depressive disorder, recurrent, severe”.
- This is an example of a...
  - A. Sign
  - B. Symptom
  - C. Syndrome
  - D. Diagnosis

# Part 1. Quiz Question #4

- While you help her call her sister who lives down the street (to take her to the ER), you note that her movements and speech are very slow.
- Slow movements and speech are...
  - A. Signs
  - B. Symptoms
  - C. Syndromes
  - D. Diagnoses

# Signs, Symptoms, Syndromes, and Diagnoses

<i>Sign</i>	<i>Symptom</i>	<i>Syndrome</i>	<i>Diagnosis</i>
Slow speech	Insomnia	Depression	Major Depressive Disorder, Recurrent, Severe
Slow movements	Poor appetite		
Observed sadness and tearfulness	Feeling nervous, sad, hopeless		
Observed loss of interest in activities	Difficulty with concentration and memory		

# Recognizing Signs and Symptoms of Mental Illnesses

## Part 2.

Signs and Symptoms That Involve Mood/Affect/Emotions

# Mood and Affect

- Inner emotional state
- Mood = subjectively experienced emotion
- Affect = observed expression of emotion
- Problems with mood are often symptoms!
- Problems with affect are often signs!
- Major Depression and Bipolar Disorder are called “mood disorders” or “affective disorders” (disorders of emotional state)

# Mood Symptoms

- Sadness / “dysphoric mood”
- Depression
- Grief or mourning (appropriate to real loss)
- Irritability / easily annoyed or provoked
- Mood swings (rapid ups and downs)
- Elevated mood (too happy)
- Euphoria / “high” mood (much too happy)
- Ecstasy (much, much too happy)

# Mood Symptoms



the "normal" mood range



depressed dysphoric sad euthymic happy elevated euphoric



Major Depressive Episode



Manic Episode

# Signs Involving Affect

- Inappropriate affect (emotional tone doesn't match up with thoughts)
- Elevated affect
- Depressed affect
- Labile affect (rapidly shifting)
- Restricted affect (reduced feelings)
- Blunted affect (much reduced feelings)
- Flat affect (absence of apparent feelings)

# Major Depression...common S/S

- Sadness, depressed mood
- Decreased appetite, difficulty sleeping
- Loss of interest in pleasurable activities
- Feeling worthless, low self-esteem
- Feelings of helplessness, hopelessness
- Fatigue, low energy
- Difficulty concentrating, poor memory
- Excessive guilt feelings
- Thoughts of death or suicidal thoughts

# Bipolar Disorder...common S/S

- Irritability, labile affect
- Laughter
- Racing thoughts, easily distracted
- Elevated mood, euphoria
- More talkative than normal, rapid speech
- Excessive happiness
- Decreased need for sleep
- Increased goal-directed activity
- Grandiosity, excessive self-esteem

# Recognizing Signs and Symptoms of Mental Illnesses

## Part 3.

### Signs and Symptoms That Involve Thinking

# Signs Involving Thinking

- Normal thought process = linear, logical
- Disorganized thinking (difficult to follow)
- “Tangentiality” (goes off on odd tangent)
- “Circumstantiality” (around in a big circle)
- Thought blocking (can’t get thoughts out)
- Loosening of associations
- “Neologisms”
- Word salad

# Tangentiality

- Inability to have goal-directed associations of thought; patient never gets from desired point to desired goal
- “I don’t want to go to jail. Jail is for the birds. One time I saw birds flying around in the jail. Birds should be out in the air. The air is dirty in Atlanta. All of these big Marta buses. I ride the bus to get my groceries. Kroger is my favorite store.”

# Loosening of Associations

- Ideas shift from one subject to another in a completely unrelated way.
- “I don’t want to go to jail. Wal-Mart ain’t open yet. Last time I got hurt in jail. The birds can’t fly out of the cage. It’s too tight. April fools!”

# Neologisms

- New word created by the patient, often by combining syllables of other words
- “Biblification”
- “Curadiosity”
- “Holification”
- “Snitich”

# Word Salad

- Incoherent mixture of words and phrases
- “I don’t want to go to jail. Biblification. Genesis. Revelations. Birds fly in. Marta. Narta. Parta. Holification. Wal-Mart birds.”

# Schizophrenia...common S/S

- Signs involving thinking are often present in schizophrenia and related disorders
- These disorders are sometimes called “primary thought disorders”
- Other common symptoms/signs of schizophrenia include auditory hallucinations and delusions ...

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## Part 4.

Signs and Symptoms that  
Involve Senses / Perception  
or Beliefs

# Hallucinations

- 5 senses, 5 abnormalities of senses
- Hearing: auditory hallucinations  
(commonly referred to as “hearing voices”)
- Seeing: visual hallucinations (rare)
- Smelling: olfactory hallucinations (rare)
- Tasting: gustatory hallucinations (rare)
- Feeling: tactile hallucinations (rare)

# Delusions

- A fixed, false belief
- “the FBI is following me”
- “I’m Moses, I’m here to free the people”
- “someone planted wires in my body”
- “cameras have been planted in the walls”
- “the President is in love with me”
- “there are bugs in my skin”
- “Michael Jackson is my boyfriend”

# Recognizing Signs and Symptoms of Mental Illnesses

Part 5.

Signs and Symptoms  
of Anxiety

# Symptoms of Anxiety

- Worry
- Fear
- Nervousness
- Tension
- Shakiness / tremor
- Heart racing, elevated blood pressure
- Difficulty breathing
- Headache

# Specific Forms of Anxiety

- Panic attack (sudden attack of severe anxiety, with physical symptoms)
- Agoraphobia (fear of open spaces)
- Obsessions (recurring thought)
- Compulsions (repeated behavior)
- Hypervigilance (high startle response)
- Phobias (specific fear)

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Part 6.

Miscellaneous  
Signs and Symptoms

# Common S/S of Delirium

- Syndrome that usually develops fairly suddenly; due to a medical illness, fever, a seizure, a medicine, or a drug (intoxication or withdrawal)
- Confusion
- Disorientation
- Sleepiness
- Poor attention
- Restlessness

# Common S/S of Dementia

- Syndrome that usually develops slowly (months to years) in an elderly person (usually >65); most common cause is Alzheimer's Disease
- Confusion
- Disorientation
- Short-term memory problems
- Wandering
- Irritability / agitation

# Common S/S of Addiction

- “Abuse” and “Dependence”
- Tolerance (need increased amounts of drug; same amount causes less effect)
- Withdrawal (syndrome of physical and psychological s/s upon stopping the drug)
- Craving
- Denial
- Interference with functioning

# S/S Involving Speech

- Mutism
- Slow speech
- Whispering
- Rapid speech
- Hyperverbal speech
- Pressured speech

# S/S Involving Movements

- Tics
- Tremors
- Rapid movements / psychomotor agitation
- Slow movements / psychomotor retardation
- Signs of catatonia

# Impaired Insight

- Insight is the ability of the patient to understand the true cause and nature of the situation and signs/symptoms
- Insight is commonly impaired in schizophrenia and related disorders, as well as bipolar disorder

# Recognizing Signs and Symptoms of Mental Illnesses

## Part 7. Case Stories

# Major Depressive Disorder

- You are called to the home of a 65yowm who called 9-1-1 after an overdose on Tylenol. His wife died 2 months ago. He needs to go to the ER due to the dangerousness of Tylenol overdose.
- Sadness
- Weight loss
- Loss of interest in activities
- Difficulty falling asleep and staying asleep

# Bipolar Disorder

- You are called to a local gas station due to complaints about a man preaching. Upon arrival, you find a 28yoAAM dressed in a gold robe proclaiming to be Jesus.
- Irritability
- Laughing loudly
- Hyperverbal speech
- Religious delusions
- Tangential thinking

# Schizophrenia

- You are called to the home of a 32yowm after he pulled the lights out of the ceiling. He is talking to himself, looks afraid, and makes threatening statements.
- Paranoia
- Auditory hallucinations
- Disorganized thinking
- Poor hygiene and grooming
- Poor insight

# Dementia

- You are called to the home of a 85yoAAm. His family called because of agitated behavior, including throwing dishes.
- Confused
- Disoriented (“1968”)
- Paranoid delusions
- Impaired short-term memory

# Alcohol Dependence

- A 35yowm waves you down as you drive down Boulevard. He is shaky and sweaty. He says that he needs to go to the hospital “for detox”. He smells of alcohol.
- Withdrawal
- Excessive intake
- Poor physical health
- Interference with functioning
- At risk for seizures

# Presentation Prepared By:

Michael T. Compton, M.D., M.P.H.

Assistant Professor

Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral  
Sciences

Emory University School of Medicine