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Do we agree on whether the patient is psychotic or not?

J. Nielsen, K. Stage, A. Lindhardt, B. Mogensen, P. Munk-Jørgensen

Aalborg Psychiatric Hospital

Background: The term psychotic is often used by doctors, psychologists and caregivers but whether they use the term in the same situations is unclear. Whether the patient is psychotic or not can be of crucial importance when deciding whether to use e.g. compulsory admission, antipsychotic treatment or sentence to prison. In Denmark the ICD-10 diagnostic criteria are used, but a broader legal psychotic definition is also used interchangeably.

Method: Doctors, psychologists and caregivers from eight hospitals in Denmark were asked to fill out a questionnaire with 11 cases and demographic variables. From the description of the cases they had to decide whether they found the patient psychotic or not.

Results: Two-hundred-forty-three answered the questionnaire. Doctors used the term psychotic more often than psychologists and caregivers (χ^2 , $P = 0.01$).

Psychiatric consultants used the term psychotic more often than staff psychiatrists (χ^2 , $P = 0.005$). No correlation was found between the use of the term psychotic and the degree of biological conviction ($r=0.03$).

Conclusion: Doctors seem to use the term psychotic more often than psychologists and caregivers. Doctors might use the term psychotic more broadly due to the legal aspects of restraint and compulsory treatment. Other professionals might tend to use the ICD-10 definition more strictly.