

## Schizophrenia Spectrum and Other Psychotic Disorders

Changes proposed in the diagnostic criteria of schizophrenia are modest and continuity with *DSM-IV* is broadly maintained. Two changes have been made. One change is the elimination of the special attribution of bizarre delusions and Schneiderian first-rank auditory hallucinations (for example, two or more voices conversing). The second change is the addition of a requirement that at least one of the Criterion A symptoms must be delusions, hallucinations, or disorganized thinking. The *DSM-IV* subtypes of schizophrenia are eliminated due to their limited diagnostic stability, low reliability, and poor validity. These subtypes have not been shown to exhibit distinctive patterns of treatment response or longitudinal course, and doubtful validity. In *DSM-5*, schizoaffective disorder is reconceptualized as a longitudinal and not a cross-sectional diagnosis. Criterion A for delusional disorder no longer has the requirement that the delusions must be nonbizarre.

The questions below are from *DSM-5 Self-Exam Questions: Test Questions for the Diagnostic Criteria*, which may be preordered from American Psychiatric Publishing by clicking [here](#). The book, available in October, contains 500 questions for all the categories of psychiatric disorders and includes Section III. The questions were developed under the leadership of Philip Muskin, M.D., a professor of clinical psychiatry at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons.

1. A 30-year-old single woman comes to medical attention. She had auditory and persecutory delusions for two months, followed by a full major depressive episode with sad mood, anhedonia, and suicidal ideation lasting three months. While the depressive episode resolved with pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy, the psychotic symptoms persisted

for another month before resolving. What is the most likely diagnosis for this patient?

- a) psychotic disorder NOS
- b) schizoaffective disorder
- c) major depressive disorder
- d) major depression with psychotic features
- e) mixed depression and mania

**Correct Answer: B.** schizoaffective disorder

**Rationale:** During this period of illness, the woman's symptoms concurrently met criteria for a major depressive episode and Criterion A for schizophrenia. Auditory hallucinations and delusions were present both before and after the depressive phase. The total period of illness lasted for about six months, with psychotic symptoms alone present during the initial two months, both depressive and psychotic symptoms present during the next three months, and psychotic symptoms alone present during the last month. The duration of the depressive episode was not brief relative to the total duration of the psychotic disturbance.

2. Mr. C is a 27-year-old unmarried truck driver with a five-year history of active and residual symptoms of schizophrenia. He developed symptoms of major depression, which lasted four months (treated) including depressed mood and anhedonia, as well as an episode of mania that lasted six weeks, which resolved. What is the diagnosis that best fits Mr. C's clinical presentation?

- a) schizoaffective disorder
- b) psychosis NOS
- c) depression NOS
- d) schizophrenia
- e) mixed anxiety and depression

**Correct Answer: D.** Schizophrenia

**Rationale:** The depressive and manic episodes, taken together, do not occupy more than one year during the five-year history. Thus the presentation does not meet Criterion C of schizoaffective disorder, and the diagnosis remains schizophrenia. The additional diagnosis of depressive disorder not elsewhere classified may be added to indicate the superimposed major depressive episode.

3. Choose the symptom that would NOT be classified as a psychotic symptom for the purpose of diagnosing schizophrenia in *DSM-5*.

- a) a patient is hearing a voice that tells him he is a good person
- b) a patient believes he is being followed by a secret police service that is only focused on him
- c) a patient has a flashback to a war experience that feels like it is happening again
- d) a patient can't organize his thoughts and stops responding in the middle of an interview
- e) a patient presents wearing an automobile tire around his waist and gives no explanation

**Correct Answer: C.** A patient has a flashback to a war experience that feels like it is happening again.

**Rationale:** Schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders are defined by abnormalities in four areas that are considered psychotic, namely: (1) delusions (false fixed beliefs), (2) hallucinations (sensory experiences in the absence of corresponding stimuli), (3) disorganized thinking (frank disorders in formal thinking), and (4) disorganized or catatonic behaviors. In addition to these active psychotic symptoms the diagnosis of schizophrenia requires "negative"

symptoms, also known as deficit symptoms, which represent losses of normal functioning. A flashback to a traumatic experience is an intensified, emotionally laden memory but does not reach the level of a psychotic symptom. Each of the other symptoms described above fit into one of the four main categories of psychosis described.

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