Difficult Patients
Psychiatry – Primary Care
Are they different?
There are patients in every practice who give the doctor and staff a feeling of "heartsink" every time they consult.

They evoke an overwhelming mixture of exasperation, defeat, and sometimes plain dislike that causes the heart to sink when they consult.

Ellis, a general practitioner, coined the phrase "dysphoria" to define "the feelings felt in the pit of your stomach when their names are seen on the morning's appointment list."

O’Dowd, TC, British Medical Journal 1988
"Hateful patients" are not those with whom the physician has an occasional personality clash. As defined here they are those whom most physicians dread. The insatiable dependency of "hateful patients" leads to behaviors that group them into four stereotypes: dependent clingers, entitled demanders, manipulative help-rejecters and self-destructive deniers.”

Groves, JE NEJM 1978
• 113 primary care outpatients
• 10-20 % Difficult (30 item DDPQ)
• Difficulty independent of age, race, sex, total number and most types of medical diagnoses
• Difficult patients:
  – Multiple somatic complaints
  – Axis I psychiatric diagnosis
  – Personality Disorder
• 627 primary care outpatients
• 15% Difficult
• Difficult patients:
  – More likely to have psychiatric dx (67% vs 25%)
  – More functional impairment
  – Higher healthcare utilization
  – Lower satisfaction with care
STPPBRN Difficult Patients

• Pilot Study  September 2009
• 11 psychiatrists
• 492 patients
• Do you have a negative reaction to this patient? Yes / No
• What is patient diagnosis?
• 10% of patients
• Systematic assessment
• What is prevalence of Difficult Patients in psychiatric practice?
• What patient characteristics are associated with difficulty?
• What psychiatrist characteristics are associated with difficulty?
• How do difficult psychiatric patients compare to difficult primary care patients?
STPPBRN Difficult Patients

• Patient Variables
• Doctor Variables
• Rating Difficulty
## Data Collection – Patient Variables

All answers to this questionnaire are strictly confidential.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Card #</th>
<th>Date:<strong><strong>/</strong></strong>/____</th>
<th>Site ID:__________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Setting:
- [ ] Office/Out-Pt
- [ ] In-patient
- [ ] Phone
- [ ] Email
- Age: _______

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex:</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>Age:</th>
<th>Race: Wh</th>
<th>Hsp</th>
<th>Blk</th>
<th>Asn</th>
<th>Othr</th>
<th>Language issue: Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Demographic
- Payer: Govt (Medi/Tricare), PVT Insurance, Self Pay
- New / Estab: _______ Appt Duration: <19 min, 20-30min, 45-50min, >59 min

### Check all Diagnoses.
- [ ] MDD/Dysthymia
- [ ] Panic/GAD/OCD/SAD
- [ ] Schizophrenia
- [ ] Bipolar Disorder
- [ ] PTSD
- [ ] Alc/Substance
- [ ] ADHD/Impulse Cntrl
- [ ] Eating Disorder
- [ ] Cognitive Disorder
- [ ] Axis II Cluster A-avoid-odd, B-dramatic-erratic, C-anxious-fearful
- [ ] Axis III Chronic Pain / Fatigue / Cardiac / GI / Neuro Other (Specify)

### Current Medications
- (number only) Psychotropic: ________ Other: __________

### How Difficult is this Patient?
- Not At all
- Borderline
- Mild
- Moderate
- Markedly
- Severe
- Amongst the Most
Data Collection – Physician Variables

- Age
- Sex
- years in practice (MIT, < 7 yr, 7-15 yr, > 15 yr)
- practice setting (solo, 2-5, Group > 6)
- # hours worked per week (<40 hr, 40 – 45 hr, 46-50 hr, >50 hr)
- ***role: med management vs. psychotherapist***
## Data Collection – Difficulty Rating

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(DDPR-10)</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How much are you looking forward to this patient’s next visit after seeing this patient today?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How &quot;frustrating&quot; do you find this patient?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How manipulative is this patient?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent are you frustrated by this patient’s vague complaints?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How self-destructive is this patient?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you find yourself secretly hoping this patient will not return?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How at ease did you feel when you were with this patient today?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How time-consuming is caring for this patient?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How enthusiastic do you feel about caring for this patient?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How difficult is it to communicate with this patient?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is Patient in Psychotherapy?</th>
<th>N / Y.</th>
<th>If yes, with you?</th>
<th>N / Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**School of Medicine**

**UT Health Science Center**

**PBRN Resource Center**
Procedure

• The data was collected during the Month of April 2010

• 20 psychiatrists collected cards on 50 patients each either consecutively or by choosing one to two days a week to collect cards on their patients.
Psychiatrist Characteristics – Age and Sex

### Age

- 31-40 yrs (4)
- 41-50 yrs (4)
- 51-60 yrs (7)
- >61 yrs (5)

### Sex

- Male
- Female

- Male: 8
- Female: 2
Psychiatrist Demographics

Mean time in current setting: 12.1 years (10.7 sd)
Median: 8.5 years
Min: 1 year, Max: 38 years

Years in Practice

- <5 yrs: 1
- 6-15 yrs: 9
- 16-25 yrs: 2
- >26 yrs: 8

Practice Setting

- Solo: 8
- Grp 2-5: 5
- Grp >5: 7

Time in Current Setting
Mean: 12.1 years (10.7 sd)
Median: 8.5 years
Min: 1 year, Max: 38 years
### Psychiatry PBRN Card Study 2 (17 June 2010)
The Difficult Doctor-Patient Relationship Questionnaire
Ten-Item Version (DDPRQ-10)
Based on a DDPRQ-10 score > 30, out of 905 patients, 133 were Difficult

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>% of Patients Rated Difficult by Item&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Difficulty (n=133)</th>
<th>Not Difficulty (n=772)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How much are you looking forward to this patient's next visit after today?&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How frustrating do you find this patient?</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How manipulative is this patient?</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. To what extent are you frustrated by this patient's vague complaints?</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. How self-destructive is this patient?</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Do you find yourself secretly hoping this patient will not return?</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. How at ease did you feel with this patient today?&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. How time-consuming is caring for this patient?</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. How enthusiastic do you feel about caring for this patient?&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. How difficult is it to communicate with this patient?</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following items were significantly associated with an increased risk of being identified as difficult:

- Diagnosis: Schizophrenia, Bipolar Disorder, Eating Disorder, any Personality Disorder, and Cognitive Disorder
- Appointment Duration: < 19 minutes
- Payor Source: Government (Medicaid, Medicare, TriCare)
- Psychotropic medication
The following items were significantly associated with a decreased risk of being identified as difficult:

- Diagnosis: Depressive Disorder, Anxiety Disorder
- Psychotherapy: In psychotherapy, In psychotherapy with psychiatrist
• The following items did not differentiate difficult from non difficult patients:
  – Diagnosis: PTSD, ADHD, any Axis III disorder
  – Age, Gender, or patient status
There were no significant characteristics distinguishing “burdened” psychiatrists from “nonburdened” psychiatrists.

This would include:

- years in practice,
- type of practice,
- payor source,
- using psychotherapy, or
- number of medications prescribed.
Conclusions

• Difficult patients are present in primary care and psychiatric practices in the same prevalence, ~ 15%

• Somatization, unexplained physical complaints, is a significant source of difficulty for primary care patients but not psychiatric patients