

Ricardo Salazar, M.D.¹, Randall V. Sellers, M.D.⁴, Cervando Martinez, Jr., M.D.¹, Melvin Cohen, M.D.⁴, John Tierney, M.D.⁴, Stephen L. Stern, M.D.¹, Jose G. Garcia, M.D., M.P.H.⁴, Don D. Howe, M.D.⁴, Melissa Deuter, M.D.⁴, Norma Ketchum MS³, and Stephanie Reyes BA² ¹Department of Psychiatry and ²Institute for Integration of Medicine & Science, ³ Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, University of Texas Health Science Center San Antonio, ⁴South Texas Psychiatric Practice-Based Research Network

ABSTRACT

Background

General practitioners (GPs) are usually the first contact person for patients suffering from psychological and physical problems and therefore play a central role in the detection, prevention, and management of mental disorders. Adequate detection and management of these disorders pose a challenge to the health care system. Not only do these disorders have a high prevalence, but patients suffering from them make up a disproportionately large portion of GPs's workloads and are often considered difficult and draining to treat. This study illustrates how fundamental research partnerships are coming together: the partnership of academic researchers with community psychiatrists and their patients to answer the following question: The Difficult Patient, Psychiatry vs. Primary Care Setting, Are they Different?

Objective: To determine the patient and physician practice characteristics associated with the difficult patient in psychiatric practice.

Methods

Using a validated scale in primary care, the Difficult Doctor-Patient Relationship Questionnaire (DDPRQ-10), and a network created 7-item Likert scale (PBRN), the South Texas Psychiatric Practice-Based Research Network collected data from a total of 935 physician-patient interactions involving 20 psychiatrists across different settings (Private, Public, and Federal Hospitals; Rural and Urban; Inpatient and Outpatient; and telephone interactions) and practice interests (General, Forensic, Psychosomatic, Geriatrics, and Child), through a card study. Median DDPRQ-10 scores were compared using the Kruskal-Wallis test. Statistical associations between difficulty group and patient or physician characteristic were assessed with the Chi-Square or Fishers Exact test, as appropriate. The simple Kappa coefficient was used to measure the amount of agreement between the two scales. Furthermore, using Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the DDPRQ-10 and PBRN scale for internal consistency.

Results

Of the 935 physician-patient interactions, 905 were available for DDPRQ-10 scale analysis. Among these 905 patients , 133 (15%) were classified as difficult patients (A score greater than 30 was considered "Difficult"). Of the 933 patients with PBRN difficulty scale responses, 184 (20%) were classified as difficult patients (A response of Markedly, Severe, or Amongst the Most were considered "Difficult"). Comparison of the two scales showed moderate agreement (Simple Kappa Coefficient= 0.49, 95% CI=0.42, 0.57). Nonetheless, psychometric scale analysis using Cronbach`s alpha coefficient for the DDPRQ-10 in this study shows an alpha value of 0.88, demonstrating a very good internal consistency for the Difficult Patient study. Additionally, by incorporating the PBRN 7-item Likert scale single question after adjusting into a 6 point scale, How difficult is this patient?, into the DDPRQ-10, the PBRN scale compares well with the other items and the resulting alpha is 0.89.

Median DDPRQ-10 was increased for patients with diagnosis of Schizophrenia, Personality Disorder, Cognitive Disorder, and Bipolar Disorder (All p <.001), when compared to patients without these diagnosis. Also the percentage of DDPRQ-10 difficult patients diagnosed with Alcohol/Substance Abuse Disorders was 23%, when compared to 13.6% for patients without these diagnoses (p= 0.01). Additionally, appointments less than 19 minutes, bills paid by the government, and patients who had languages issues also had increased median DDPRQ-10 scores (p ≤ .001). The percentage of DDPRQ-10 difficult patients diagnosed with Major Depression was 10.6% when compared to 17.5% for patients without this diagnosis (p = 0.004), with a similar finding for Anxiety (9.2% vs. 16.3%, p = 0.01). Median DDPRQ-10 scores did not differ for patients with PTSD, ADHD, or any Axis III diagnosis compared to patients without these diagnoses, as well as for age, gender, and patient status (new/established).

Decreased median DDPRQ-10 scores were seen for patients with depression and anxiety disorders, patients in psychotherapy, and in psychotherapy with psychiatrist. Younger psychiatrists identified more difficult patients regardless of rating scale. The DDPRQ-10 and PBRN scales identified 24.5% and 36.8% difficult patients among psychiatrists between the ages of 31 and 40 years respectively, while among psychiatrists older than 60 years of age the DDPRQ-10 and PBRN identified 11.9% and 6.5% difficult patients respectively (DDPRQ-10 p=0.003; PBRN p<0.001). According to the DDPRQ-10, there were no gender differences. However, on the PBRN scale, female psychiatrists identified 37% of patients as difficult in contrast to male psychiatrists who identified 15% (p<0.001). For the PBRN scale, the percentage of difficult patients was highest for the newest psychiatrists (< 5 years, 42.9%), although this group contained only 1 doctor.

Percentages of difficult patients differed between groups with 6 or more years in practice, but with no clear pattern (6-15 yrs, 22%; 16-25 yrs, 32%; > 26yr, 12%) p<0.001. Psychiatrists practicing in groups tended to identify more difficult patients regardless of rating scale. (DDPRQ-10: solo, 10%; 2-5, 15%; >5, 20%; p=0.002 and PBRN: solo, 12%; 2-5, 28%; >5, 23%; p<0.001). Years in current setting was not associated with difficulty category according to the DDPRQ-10. For the PBRN scale, more difficult patients were seen by psychiatrists who were new in their practice setting (< 5yrs, 23%) or who had been there for a while (16-25 yrs, 27%). The percentage of difficult patients decreased with some experience (6-15 yrs, 13%) and with the most experience (>26 yrs, 16%) (p=0.001). According to the DDPRQ-10, a heavy work load (51-55 hours/wk) was associated with the least number of difficult patients, 5%. This was in contrast to all other loads (<40 hr/wk, 18%; 40-45 hrs/wk, 16%, 46-50 hrs/wk, 17%, and > 55hrs/wk, 14%) (p=0.04). For the PBRN scale the psychiatrists with the lightest work load (<40 hours/wk) had the greatest number of difficult patients (30.7%), the 40-45 hour/ wk group had the least (11.6%), and the remaining categories (>46 hours/wk) fell somewhere in between (p<0.001).

Evidence-Based Cross-Sectional Study of the Difficult Patient in Psychiatric Practice: A South Texas Psychiatric Practice-Based Research Network (PBRN) Study

						PBRN scale	
		Difficult	DPRQ-10 scale Not Difficult	P-value	Difficult	Not Difficult	P-value
Age	N	132	762	0.6 ^b	183	739	0.7 ^b
•	Mean (SD)	40.6 (19.5)	41.7 (22.1)	0.0	41.7 (19.7)	41.3 (22.2)	0.7
	Median	42	44		44	43	
	Min, Max	8, 82	3, 91		5, 85	3, 91	
Age, n (%)	43 or younger	68 (15.5)	372 (84.5)	0.57 ^a	88 (19.3)	367 (80.7)	0.7 ^a
	Older than 43	64 (14.1)	390 (85.9)		95 (20.3)	372 (79.7)	
	Total	132	762		183	739	
Gender, n (%)	Male	71 (14.1)	431 (85.9)	0.54 ^ª	95 (18.2)	428 (81.8)	0.14 ^ª
	Female	62 (15.6)	335 (84.4)	0101	89 (22)	315 (78)	0.2.1
	Total	133	766		184	743	
Race, n (%)	White	65 (13.1)	430 (86.9)	0.08 ^ª	104 (20.6)	400 (79.4)	0.07 ^a
	Hispanic	43 (15)	244 (85)	0.00	48 (15.8)	255 (84.2)	
	Black	15 (24.6)	46 (75.4)		14 (22.6)	48 (77.4)	
	Asian/Other	3 (25)	9 (75)		5 (41.7)	7 (58.3)	
	Total	126	729		171	710	
Setting, n <mark>(</mark> %)	Office/Out-Pt	100 (13.5)	643 (86.5)	0.007 ^ª	128 (16.7)	637 (83.3)	<0.001 ^ª
	In-Pt	25 (25.3)	74 (74.7)		38 (36.5)	66 (63.5)	
	phone	3 (10.7)	25 (89.3)		11 (39.3)	17 (60.7)	
	Total	128	742		177	720	
Psychiatric Diagnosis, n (%)	Yes	132 (14.7)	763 (85.3)	1 ^c	183 (19.8)	740 (80.2)	0.7 ^c
	No	1 (10)	9 (90)		1 (10)	9 (90)	
	Total	133	772		184	749	
Depression, n (%)	Yes	39 (10.6)	329 (89.4)	0.004 ^ª	55 (14.6)	322 (85.4)	0.001 ^ª
	No	94 (17.5)	443 (82.5)		129 (23.2)	427 (76.8)	
	Total	133	772		184	749	
Anxiety, n (%)	Yes	19 (9.2)	188 (90.8)	0.01 ^ª	39 (18.7)	170 (81.3)	0.66 ^ª
	No	114 (16.3)	584 (83.7)		145 (20)	579 (80)	
	Total	133	772		184	749	
Bipolar Disorder, n (%)	Yes	34 (18.9)	146 (81.1)	0.08 ^a	53 (29.1)	129 (70.9)	<0.001 ^ª
	No	99 (13.7)	626 (86.3)		131 (17.4)	620 (82.6)	
	Total	133	772		184	749	
Schizophrenia, n <mark>(</mark> %)	Yes	25 (31.6)	54 (68.4)	<0.001ª	36 (41.9)	50 (58.1)	<0.001 ^ª
	No	108 (13.1)	718 (86.9)		148 (17.5)	699 (82.5)	
	Total	133	772		184	749	

			DPRQ-10 scale			PBRN scale	
		Difficult	Not Difficult	P-value	Difficult	Not Difficult	P-value
Cognitive Disorder, n (%)	Yes	25 (24.3)	78 (75.7)	0.004 ^ª	25 (23.4)	82 (76.6)	0.31 ^ª
	No	108 (13.5)	694 (86.5)		159 (19.2)	667 (80.8)	
	Total	133	772		184	749	
Alcohol/Substance Abuse, n(%)	Yes	24 (23.1)	80 (76.9)	0.01 ^ª	40 (35.4)	73 (64.6)	<0.001ª
	No	109 (13.6)	692 (86.4)		144 (17.6)	676 (82.4)	
	Total	133	772		184	749	
PTSD, n (%)	Yes	6 (6.7)	84 (93.3)	0.02 ^ª	19 (20.7)	73 (79.3)	0.81 ^ª
	No	127 (15.6)	688 (84.4)		165 (19.6)	676 (80.4)	
	Total	133	772		184	749	
ADHD, n (%)	Yes	27 (12.3)	192 (87.7)	0.26 ^ª	36 (16)	189 (84)	0.11 ^ª
	No	106 (15.5)	580 (84.5)		148 (20.9)	560 (79.1)	
	Total	133	772		184	749	
Eating Disorder, n (%)	Yes	3 (37.5)	5 (62.5)	0.1 ^c	4 (50)	4 (50)	0.05 ^c
	No	130 (14.5)	767 (85.5)		180 (19.5)	745 (80.5)	
	Total	133	772		184	749	
Personality Disorder, n (%)	Yes	48 (31.8)	103 (68.2)	<0.001ª	69 (45.1)	84 (54.9)	<0.001ª
	No	85 (11.3)	669 (88.7)		115 (14.7)	665 (85.3)	
	Total	133	772		184	749	
Cluster A, n (%)	Yes	9 (24.3)	28 (75.7)	0.09 ^a	21 (55.3)	17 (44.7)	<0.001 ^ª
	No	124 (14.3)	744 (85.7)		163 (18.2)	732 (81.8)	
	Total	133	772		184	749	
Cluster B, n (%)	Yes	31 (38.3)	50 (61.7)	<0.001 ^ª	43 (53.1)	38 (46.9)	<0.001 ^ª
	No	102 (12.4)	722 (87.6)		141 (16.5)	711 (83.5)	
	Total	133	772		184	749	
Cluster C, n (%)	Yes	9 (22.5)	31 (77.5)	0.15ª	10 (24.4)	31 (75.6)	0.44 ^ª
	No	124 (14.3)	741 (85.7)		174 (19.5)	718 (80.5)	
	Total	133	772		184	749	
Physical Symptoms, n (%)	Yes	28 (9.7)	261 (90.3)	0.004 ^ª	64 (21.7)	231 (78.3)	0.3ª
	No	105 (17)	511 (83)		120 (18.8)	518 (81.2)	
	Total	133	772		184	749	

	905 Patients w	Ith DDPRQ-1	0 Score and 93	3 Patients		Score	
		D	DPRQ-10 scale			PBRN scale	
		Difficult	Not Difficult	P-value	Difficult	Not Difficult	P-value
Language barrier, n (%)	Yes	8 (33.3)	16 (66.7)	0.003 ^ª	9 (37.5)	15 (62.5)	0.02 ^ª
	No	92 (12.4)	650 (87.6)		140 (18.2)	628 (81.8)	
	Total	100	666		149	643	
Psychotherapy, n (%)	Yes	54 (11)	436 (89)	0.004 ^ª	100 (19.9)	402 (80.1)	0.98 ^ª
	No	60 (18.2)	270 (81.8)		69 (20)	276 (80)	
	Total	114	706		169	276 (80) 678 692 (80) 0.9 ^a 46 (80.7) 738 392 (79.5) 0.27 ^a 87 (79.8) 235 (83) 718	
Psychotropic medication, n (%)	Yes	118 (14)	724 (86)	0.08ª	173 <mark>(</mark> 20)	692 (80)	0.9ª
	No	12 (22.6)	41 (77.4)		11 (19.3)	46 (80.7)	
	Total	130	765		184	738	
Payment method, n (%)	Govt(Medi/Tric are)	81 (16.9)	398 (83.1)	0.01 ^ª	101 (20.5)	392 (79.5)	0.27ª
	PVT Insurance	11 (10.2)	97 (89.8)		22 (20.2)	87 (79.8)	
	Self Pay	28 (10)	252 (90)		48 (17)		
	Total	120	747		174	718	
Status, n (%)	New	24 (22.6)	82 (77.4)	0.03 ^ª	32 (28.1)	82 (71.9)	0.03
	Established	95 (14.5)	561 (85.5)		130 (19.4)	541 (80.6)	
	Total	119	643		162	623	
Appointment duration, n (%)	<19 min	30 (15.9)	159 (84.1)	0.37 ^ª	33 (17.1)	160 (82.9)	0.26ª
	20-30 min	39 (12.3)	277 (87.7)		59 (18.1)	267 (81.9)	
	45-50 min	22 (10.6)	186 (89.4)		43 (20.5)	167 (79.5)	
	>59 min	15 (15.6)	81 (84.4)		27 (26)	77 (74)	
	Total	106	703		162	671	

For DDPRQ-10 Scores Difficult category contains patients with DDPRQ-10 score >30 Not Difficult category contains patients with DDPRQ-10 score <=30

For PBRN Scores

Difficult category contains responses of either Markedly, Severe, or Amongst the Most. Not Difficult category contains responses of either Not at all, Borderline, Mild or Moderate.

a. Chi-Square Test b. Kruskal-Wallis Test c. Fishers Exact Tes





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RESULTS Difficult Patients by Physician Demographic Characterist DDPRQ-10 Respo **Psychiatrist Demographics** Patient Score Catego PBRN Likert item Factor 1: The demand 60 (30.2) 139 (69.8) 51 (15.4) 280 (84.6) Factor 2: Physician d 16 (6.5) 232 (93.5) 184 749 107 (14.7) 620 (85.3) Male Female 77 (37.4) 129 (62.6) 184 749 Factor 3: Compliance 3 (42.9) 4 (57.1) <0.00 0 (0.0) 0 (0.0) 31-40 41-50 51-60 >61 yr 93 (21.7) 335 (78.3) 69 (16.2) 356 (83.8) 9 (45) yrs (4) yrs (4) yrs (7) 48 (32) 102 (68) 15 (10.2) 132 (89.8) 40 (11.5) 308 (88.5) 49 (14.7) 284 (85.3) Factor 4: The self-des 184 749 48 (12) 352 (88) Practice Setting 65 (28.4) 164 (71.6) 71 (23.4) 233 (76.6) 184 749 80 (22.6) 274 (77.4) 32 (12.9) 217 (87.1) group 2-5 PRQ-10: Score great 48 (26.5) 133 (73.5) 20 (11.3) 157 (88.7) ctor 1 contains DDPRC 24 (16.1) 125 (83.9) tor 2 contains DDPRC < 5 yrs 6-15 16-25 > 2 yrs yrs yrs tor 3 contains DDPRC 184 749 or 4 contains DDPRQ-10 Item 5. Response of 4, 5, or 6 was considered Difficu 1 (30.7) 160 (69.3) 31 (16.1) 162 (83.9 23 (11.6) 176 (88.4) 17 (17.3) 81 (82.7) 21 (21.2) 78 (78.8) 5 (5) 95 (95) 20 (18.7) 87 (81.3) 51-55 hrs 3 (15) Years in Current Setting 40 (13.8) 249 (86.2) 49 (16.5) 248 (83.5) >55 hrs 6 (30) 184 749 < 5 yrs</p> 6-15 yrs 16-25 yrs **Patient characteristics** Difficult category contains responses of either Markedly, Severe, or Amongst the Most ot Difficult category contains responses of either Not at all, Borderline, Mild or Modera prevalence (15%). The Difficult Doctor-Patient Relationship Questionnaire Ten-Item Version (DDPRQ-10) DDPRQ-10 Difficulty Score for 905 Patients % of Patients Rated Difficult by Mean 21.1 Difficult Not Difficult (n=133) (n=772) (n=772) Median 19.0 . How much are you looking forward to this patients next visit after today . How frustrating do you find this patient? . How manipulative is this patient . To what extent are you frustrated by this patients vague complaints? 5. How self-destructive is this patient? 6. Do you find yourself secretly hoping this patient will not return psychiatrists. 7. How at ease did you feel with this patient today? 8. How time-consuming is caring for this patient? 9. How enthusiastic do you feel about caring for this patient? 10. How difficult is it to communicate with this patient? Based on a DDPR-10 score > 30, out of 905 patients, 133 were Difficult and 772 were Not Difficult a. Each item was scored on a six-point scale: 1=Not at all, 6=A great deal b. Responses were dichotomized by coding raw scores of 4 through 6 on each item as Difficult c. Item was reversed for scoring (1=A great deal, 6=Not at all) Il chi-square comparisons were significant, p<0.001

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT



BA	CK	

(DDPR-10)	Not at all						A Great deal
How much are you looking forward to this patient's next visit after seeing this patient today?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
How "frustrating" do you find this patient?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
How manipulative is this patient?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
To what extent are you frustrated by this patient's vague complaints?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
low self-destructive is this patient?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Do you find yourself secretly hoping this patient will not return?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
How at ease did you feel when you were with this patient today?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
How time-consuming is caring for this patient?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
How enthusiastic do you feel about caring for this patient?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
How difficult is it to communicate with this patient?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

patients

Research, 2006, 6:128.





			0 Difficulty Not Difficult	Total
irritating patient	Difficult	127 (95.5)	155 (20.1)	282 (31.2)
	Not Difficult Total	6 (4.5) 133	617 (79.9) 772	623 (68.8) 905
а				
	Difficult Not Difficult	131 (98.5) 2 (1.5)	356 (46.1) 416 (53.9)	487 (53.8) 418 (46.2)
	Total	133	772	905
nmunication	Difficult	71 (53.4)	50 (6.5)	121 (13.4)
	Not Difficult	62 (46.6)		784 (86.6)
	Total	133	772	905
e patient	Difficult	52 (39.1)	48 (6.2)	100 (11)
	Not Difficult Total	81 (60.9) 133	724 (93.8) 772	805 (89) 905

CONCLUSIONS

"Difficult" patients are present in primary care and psychiatric practices with the same

Having a psychiatric diagnosis of Schizophrenia, Bipolar Disorder, Personality Disorder, and Cognitive Disorder were more often identified by psychiatrists as being difficult.

Summarization, as unexplained physical complaints, is a significant source of difficulty for primary care patients, but not psychiatric patients.

Patients with Alcohol and Substance Abuse Disorders are more often identified as difficult by

Patients having a diagnosis of depression or anxiety were less likely to be classified as difficult, including patients in psychotherapy and in psychotherapy with psychiatrist.

Physician characteristics

Physicians between the ages of 31 and 40 years, working in a group practice, and working less than 40 hours per week identified more difficult patients.

Surprisingly a heavy work load (51-55 hours per week), was associated with fewer difficult

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