Standard Guidelines May Lead Doctors to Misdiagnose Mental Disorders as Schizophrenia

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Sometimes, a psychotic episode isn't the mark of a more severe mental illness. But according to experts, clinicians who rely on descriptions of schizophrenia found in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition (DSM-5) risk wrongly diagnosing and treating patients for this chronic and severe psychiatric disorder, which affects how a person thinks, feels and behaves, ScienceDaily reports.

The DSM-5 is a medical handbook used by the National Institute of Mental Health to help psychiatrists diagnose and treat mental illnesses. The manual allows clinicians and researchers to create uniform guidelines for a wide array of mental disorders.

But a recent evaluation of the guide concluded that there's a widening gap between clinical practice and treatments for serious psychiatric syndromes, in particular schizophrenia. According to Jan Dirk Blom, MD, PhD, a psychiatrist and chair in clinical psychopathology at the Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences at Leiden University in Amsterdam, the current description for schizophrenia is so broad that it could be leading to numerous misdiagnoses.

Blom said that as a result of using such broad diagnostic guidelines, many doctors treat patients with antipsychotic drugs when alternative treatments could be more effective. In addition, Blom suggested that mental health professionals try to tailor treatments to their patients. This personalized approach to therapy would require that U.S. psychiatrists diagnose and treat each patient's unique combination of symptoms, coping mechanisms and talents.

In the international medical community, schizophrenia is no longer considered a single illness. Rather, the disorder is regarded as a combination of delusions, hallucinations, disorganized speech and behavior, with a variety of other symptoms that can cause social or occupational dysfunction.

Click here to learn more about schizophrenia and its available treatments.

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