

CASE THREE

Short case: 3_25_3

Category: Mental Health and Human Behaviour

Discipline: Psychiatry

Setting: General Practice

Topic: Personality disorder_difficult patient behaviours

Case

Jack Archer, 22 years old as a waiter at the local RSL club who is an inconsistent attendee at your practice. He had a history of substance use and usually requests medical certificates to cover his work absences from work. He is often disruptive in the waiting room, and he tends to become demanding with staff if he is not seen within 30 minutes of arrival. Some staff members, find him difficult while others feel sorry for him. They are generally afraid he will threaten to take his own life if his wishes are not met (as he has often done this in the past). He has not had a diagnosis of any mental health problem. Now, Jack presents requesting a prescription for alprazolam. He says he visited the hospital ED who recommended alprazolam for anxiety but lost his discharge note.

Student to answer the following question (maximum 3 mins)

1. How would you respond to Jack's request for alprazolam? What further questions would you ask and what information would you seek?

Here, the Expert will comment on the case thus far and provide insights/context (maximum 3 mins)

After your above assessment and discussion with Jack you decide not to prescribe him the alprazolam. He quickly becomes upset and agitated. He says he will not be able to cope without the medication, and that he may take his own life if you do not prescribe it. He says you will be found to be a negligent doctor if you do not prescribe the medication for him.

Student to answer the following question (maximum 6 mins)

2. What is your differential diagnosis for Jack that would explain his history and current presentation?
3. What strategies would you use to manage Jack's current behaviour in your office?

The Expert will comment on the case thus far and provide insights/context (maximum 6 mins)

Unfortunately, despite the above strategies, Jack storms out of your office and pushes past one of your colleagues in the corridor causing him to fall into the wall. Jack yells, "Get out of the way," and holds up his fists like he is going to punch someone.

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Student to answer the following question (maximum 2 mins)

4. How would you manage Jack's current violent behaviour?

At this point, the Expert will comment on the case thus far and provide insights/context (maximum 2 mins)

Jack has now left the practice, but everyone is feeling threatened by Jack.

Student to answer the following question (maximum 4 mins)

5. How will you manage this situation going forward? Think about whether you will keep Jack as a patient, and if not, how would you manage this? Is there anyone else you should inform?

At this point, the Expert will comment on the case, provide insights/context, and then wrap up the presentation (maximum 4 mins).

Suggested reading:

- Stern, Theodore A., et al. Chapter 43: Difficult Patients. In: *Massachusetts General Hospital Handbook of General Hospital Psychiatry: Massachusetts General Hospital Handbook of General Hospital Psychiatry E-Book*. 7th ed. Elsevier, 2017:1317-1356. Accessed August 20, 2025.
https://findit.library.nd.edu.au/permalink/61UONDA_INST/k6ms28/cdi_proquest_ebookcentral_EBC525299_0
- WHO. *Guidelines on mental health promotive and preventive interventions for adolescents: Helping adolescents thrive*. WHO; 2020. Accessed August 20, 2025.
<https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/mental-health/guidelines-on-mental-health-promotive-and-preventive-interventions-for-adolescents-hat.pdf>
- WHO. *Mental Health: Strengthening our Response*. (See fact sheets). WHO; 2022. Accessed August 20, 2025.
<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>

Other resources:

- Davies, M. Managing challenging interactions with patients. *BMJ*. 2013;347:f4673. Accessed August 20, 2025.
https://findit.library.nd.edu.au/permalink/61UONDA_INST/1ntajja/cdi_crossref_primary_10_1136_bmj_f4673 (Tip: use the 3rd link provided – to BMJ Journals)
- Gask, L., Evans, M., & Kessler, D. Personality disorder. *BMJ*. 2013;347(7924):28–32.
https://findit.library.nd.edu.au/permalink/61UONDA_INST/1ntajja/cdi_proquest_journals_1945869852
- NSW Health. *Mental Health Act 2007*. Current version, no. 8, July 2025.
<https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/whole/html/inforce/2025-07-01/act-2007-008>
- The Parliament of Victoria. *Mental Health & Well-being Act 2022*.
<https://www.health.vic.gov.au/mental-health-and-wellbeing-act-handbook>
- Wilhelm K, Tietze T. Difficult doctor-patient interactions-Applying principles of Attachment-Based Care. *Medicine Today*. 2016;17(1-2):36-44.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/296057597_Difficult_doctor-patient_interactions_Applying_principles_of_attachment-based_care

How would you respond to Jack's request for Alprazolam (Xanax)?

Take focus off the drugs and back to his anxiety symptoms

Risk Assessment

Look up SafeScript / MyHealth Record

What is your DDX and how would you explain this to Jack?

Malingering

Personality Disorder

Substance Abuse with Withdrawal

Psychopath

Just a Cunt

What strategies would you use to manage Jack's violent behaviour in your office?

1. Maintain Safety
2. de-escalate (firm but calm)
3. set boundaries
4. arrange appropriate care (MH act if RoSH) - (but never physically block an exit)

If gets violent - Try and verbally de-escalate, let them go where they want, don't block them. If he sits down, let him cool off then offer a glass of water or a tea to show you understand he has lost his shit and you're willing to try again.

How would you manage this situation moving forward, would you keep him as a pt considering he has threatened staff etc?

Still treat him if he returns but have warning about the patient in systems for staff, can also get restraining orders and also can sign a document that will ban a patient from a hospital.