

Communication—

THE FUNCTIONAL CRITERION FOR THE EVALUATION OF THERAPY OF MENTAL DISORDERS

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The statistics of psychiatric therapeutic results, particularly in schizophrenia, are often misleading. Besides frequent failure to consider length of illness, and subsequent inclusion of short-lasting schizophrenic reactions with those of chronic schizophrenias, there is no common denominator for evaluating results. At present, four basic approaches are in use, of which three are of standard value in statistical reports. The fourth, Rado's adaptational frame of reference, using such medical terms of function as "compensated" and "decompensated," is clinically descriptive and useful for teaching but is not widely used as yet in statistics.

The main statistical approaches are: (1) the "positive" medical approach, describing "improvement" on discharge as compared to condition on admission, which is used as a baseline for judging "improvement"; (2) the "negative" medical approach describing condition on discharge in terms of "impairment" of the premorbid personality; and (3) the "functional" approach, using the term "social recovery" or "social remission," and introducing the criterion of "social functioning" (functioning in the community) as a measurement of therapeutic results.

The "positive" medical approach, used by the New York State Department of Mental Hygiene, is strictly formulated in the *Statistical Guide*; the principles of the "negative" approach are laid down in the *Manual of Mental Disorders* of the American Psychiatric Association.

A schematic outline of the "positive" and "negative" psychiatric approaches might read as show in the table.

Of the "functional" approach, Leo Alexander notes: "A social remission or social recovery describes a patient who has sufficiently improved to resume his social and occupational activities to the full, but who has either failed to achieve insight or still retains some subjective complaints or disturbances. . . Complete recovery denotes the restoration of the mental state of the patient to what

POSITIVE APPROACH		NEGATIVE APPROACH	
(According to <i>Statistical Guide</i> , New York State Department of Mental Hygiene)		(According to <i>Manual of Mental Disorders</i> , American Psychiatric Association)	
Recovered:	Return to mental state before psychotic episode	= No impairment:	Return to premorbid personality
Improvement from condition on admission		Impairment from premorbid personality	
		Percentage of incapacity	
Much improved:	Warrants discharge	Minimal impairment	10 or less
Improved:	Improvement not enough to warrant discharge	Mild impairment	20 to 30
		Moderate impairment	30 to 50
		Severe impairment	over 50
Unimproved:	From condition on admission		

he and his relatives agree is the former 'own best self,'... An unimproved patient... is one who is either still in the hospital or a home invalid, or one who... has failed to advance with treatment to a higher grade of improvement."

The social criteria of the "functional" approach are the only objective measures of therapeutic results at present available; social recovery, or social remission, measuring the degree of the patient's social functioning in the community, can be objectively ascertained. As objective criteria, these measures also avoid overdramatization of new "miracle" drugs, as well as unjustified pessimism.

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