

MEDICAL DELIRIUM vs. PRIMARY PSYCHIATRIC



FEATURE	DELIRIUM	PSYCHIATRIC
Onset of symptoms	Recent (hours/days)	Usually chronic (weeks)
Course of symptoms	“Comes and goes”	Stays the same when present
Level of Consciousness	Decreased	Clear (they know who/what/where/when)
Hallucinations	Primarily visual/tactile	Primary auditory
Age of onset of 1 st symptoms	Any age...more suspicious In those patients over 50	Teenage years to mid-20s

Milwaukee Police Department and
Milwaukee County Behavioral
Health Division
Crisis Assessment Response Team
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IMPORTANT POINTS:

- 1) All delirium cases (and any you are unsure of) should start with medical clearance!
- 2) Having a psychiatric diagnosis (or being on meds) does not rule out delirium.....in fact, you are more likely to become delirious.
- 3) Delirium is a medical emergency.....if not treated, death or significant harm is quite possible.
- 4) Delirium can look like psychiatric symptoms.....there is no such thing as “it must be psych”.
- 5) Any case that involves dementia should begin with medical clearance.....they are more likely to be delirious on top of dementia and are likely precluded legally from a non-medical setting (like PCS).
- 6) Patients do not typically develop new psychiatric illnesses after the age of 40.
- 7) Any medical condition (including drugs/alcohol) can cause a delirious process.

Common Causes of Altered Mental Status:

AEIOU-TIPS-V

A – Alcohol, Anoxia(low oxygen), Acidosis
 E – Epilepsy with seizure activity (post-ictal),
 Electrolyte imbalance
 I – Insulin (blood sugar)
 O – Overdose (pharmacologic, toxin exposure)
 U- Uremia (liver/kidney failure or inadequacy
 of organs)
 T – Trauma, Tumor, Temperature
 I – Intracranial hemorrhage, Infection
 P – Psychiatric
 S – Stroke, Syncope (passing out)
 V – Vascular (heart attack, decreased blood
 flow to brain)

SAMPLE History

S – Signs/Symptoms
 A –Allergies
 M– Medications
 P – Past Medical History
 L – Last Oral Intake
 E – Events (leading up to
 emergency/crisis)

AVPU Scale:

A – Alert and Oriented
 V- Verbal
 P- Painful
 U- Unresponsive

Oriented “x4” to :
 Person (self) -
 Place
 Time
 Event