

## MEDICAL DELIRIUM vs. PRIMARY PSYCHIATRIC



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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 <sup>st</sup> symptoms	Any age...more suspicious In those patients over 50	Teenage years to mid-20s

### 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