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Patients' treatment requests, psychiatrists'  
understanding of patient requests, and  
adherence to treatment.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science in Clinical Psychology  
at Massey University

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February, 1982.

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to determine the treatment requests of patients in the initial psychiatric interview and to compare the relative preference of these requests to those of other patient samples. It also aimed to determine psychiatrists accuracy in estimating the importance their patients placed on their requests, and to explore the relationship between psychiatrist understanding of patient requests to patient adherence to treatment.

The study was carried out on 269 consecutive new patients to a psychiatric unit attached to a public hospital of whom 85 completed a 14 item Patient Request Form before their initial interview, and their psychiatrists completed an equivalent form at the conclusion of the interview. Patients adhered if they returned for their next appointment. Generally it was found that patients wanted psychologically based treatments most and medical oriented treatment least, and that the rank orders of the requests provided significant positive correlations with all other samples.

It was found that psychiatrists significantly underestimated six request categories and overestimated one, supporting nine of the 14 differences hypothesised. No significant relationship was found between adherence and psychiatrists understanding of patients requests. Results are discussed in terms of their implications for helping therapists understand their patients requests.

PREFACE

This research was originally designed to study patient satisfaction with the initial interview, as well as other outcome measures. A four item outcome questionnaire (see Appendix IX) was to be given to patients who agreed to participate in the research. This was considered an important measure especially as positive patient outcome, such as patient satisfaction, has previously been associated with variables of the negotiated approach. However this measure was disallowed by the authorities of the setting because it was considered that it "... would make a difficult time for the patient more difficult. This was especially so as the patient could well be already confused as to what his demands were." (Scrimgeour, G. Personal communication, May 28, 1981.)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Special thanks go to my supervisors Beryl Hesketh and Kerry Chamberlain for not only providing invaluable expertise and guidance, but also support and encouragement when things weren't going so smoothly.

Thanks to the staff of the setting for their help and co-operation.

Thanks to Dr. Ken McFarland for assistance with the statistical analysis, and Mrs. Jan Potts for typing the thesis.

Thanks to Mum and Dad for buying me a Rogets' Thesaurus.

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## OVERVIEW

The thesis deals with three main areas; an approach to the initial psychiatric interview called the negotiated approach; the central component of this approach, patient requests; and the relationship between psychiatrists' ability to understand patient requests in the initial interview, and patient adherence to treatment.

The Oxford English Dictionary (1970) defines "request" as "The act, on the part of a specified person, of asking for some favour, service etc; the expression of one's desire or wish directly addressed to the person or persons able to gratify it." In this study the "specified person" was the psychiatric patient, the "desire or wish" for "some favour or service" was the patient's desire or wish for a type of treatment, and the "person or persons" to whom it was addressed, and who were able to gratify it was the clinician, in this case a psychiatrist.

Since clinicians, after learning the patient's complaint (chief complaint) or the patient's goals, often believe they know the patient's request, it is worth distinguishing the three to help clarify our definition of "request." The complaint is the patient's initial statement as to what is bothering him; for instance, "I am depressed." The goal is what the patient would like to accomplish or how he would like to feel; for instance, "I would like to feel well enough to return to work." The request is how the patient would like the clinician to respond to help him achieve the desired goal (Lazare, Eisenthal and Wasserman, 1975a).

The relationship of patient requests to the negotiated approach is briefly as follows.

The negotiated approach requires the clinician to:-

- (a) help the patient to verbalise the request for help;
- (b) indicate an understanding of the request for help

- to the patient; and
- (c) to include the patient in the decision making about the treatment plan.

Thus the study of the patients' requests in the negotiated approach to the initial psychiatric interview is a major subset of the overall process.

This thesis aims to determine the rank order of importance of requests made by new patients to a psychiatric clinic, and compare patients request endorsement with similar research conducted in other settings.

It also aims to determine psychiatrists ability to estimate the importance their patients place on their requests, and from this to explore whether such estimates have any effect on patients adherence to treatment.