

QA

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Q I am hesitant to see a psychiatrist, as I fear being labelled as someone with a 'mental disorder.' Is it correct to think this way?

I think people should change their perception about a mental health specialist. A psychiatrist has expertise in understanding, formulating and dealing with mental health, emotional and interpersonal problems, some of which, when persistent and unresolved can get into realms of ailment or illness.

Moreover, psychiatrists are professionally licenced to diagnose a disease or disorder, as outlined in the diagnostic manuals. Though formulating a problem or an issue is essential in planning an intervention (like psychotherapy or counselling) for change from a less adaptive to a more adaptive state, when these issues impact health and manifest as an illness, they require a diagnosis.

Remember, a diagnosis does not indicate deficiency or abnormality but instead a medical categorisation of presenting features into a quickly understandable sphere. And diagnosis is not a label but a beneficial method of expediting the process of passing information between treatment providers, primarily to maintain continuity of care.

DEPRESSED MOOD IS TRANSIENT FEELINGS OF SADNESS OR BEING UPSET WHEN ONE GOES THROUGH A STRESSFUL LIFE EXPERIENCE. IT'S PART OF BEING HUMAN.



For example, consider the difference between depressed mood and clinical depression (a diagnosis). Depressed mood is transient feelings of sadness or being upset when one goes through a stressful life experience. It's part of being human. Herein, one continues to function reasonably and feelings resolve it spontaneously.

However, clinical depression is a medical condition that goes beyond life's ordinary ups and downs. Herein, one experiences persistent depressed mood, with loss of interest in a previously enjoyable activity, excessive tiredness, loss of energy, significant sleep disturbance with early waking, loss of appetite and poor concentration. Depression also begins to interfere with work, socialising or recreation. Therefore, if the above features are present on most days of the week for two continuous weeks, then it is deemed as clinical depression.

Such labelling is necessary for deciding treatment and to also share information with the treatment teams. Additionally, the individual needs to know what he/she has and what treatment is required. Finally, please do not think of yourself as a label. It does not define you and it is not a permanent identification. For instance, most people with clinical depression recover, completely. Just because you may be diagnosed with something does not mean you will always suffer those symptoms and still maintain that 'label.' Life is dynamic and everchanging, just like our health. **B**