

Review

Clin Ter 2019; 170 (2):e134-141. doi: 10.7417/CT.2019.2123

Lying in the medicolegal field: Malingering and psychodiagnostic assessment

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Abstract

The simulation of mental illness, so-called "Malingering", is a very difficult phenomenon for professionals to identify when making an assessment, especially in the medicolegal and forensic psychology and psychiatry fields. When malingering, the subject implements strategies that mimic the symptoms related to a possible psychiatric disease, with the aim of misleading the operator. It is necessary, therefore, to elicit a complete medical history and make a close clinical examination and, especially, to be able to rely on appropriate diagnostic tools. Another important aspect, in the legal medicine, and forensic psychology and psychiatry fields, is the opposite strategy, namely that of dissimulating, or masking, a disease.

nual for Mental Disorders (DSM-III), according to which dissembling is not a mental disorder but rather a condition with clear psychological implications, to which close clinical attention must therefore be devoted.

By the time the fifth edition of DSM was published, dissembling was defined as: the intentional production of false or grossly exaggerated physical or psychological symptoms, motivated by external incentives like the wish to avoid military service, or job tasks, or to obtain financial compensation, to evade penal trials or to obtain drugs. In some circumstances dissembling may be an adaptive behavior, as can occur, for example, when prisoners of war feign to be affected by a disease (2).