



# **Is Your Diagnosis Accurate, a Problem Or a Result?**

By Dr. Linda Hancock

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email [office@drlindahancock.com](mailto:office@drlindahancock.com)

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Life can be confusing and complex. Sometimes I have clients begin therapy with me after they have been given a diagnosis for a mental illness. They do not always believe or understand the way that this diagnosis was determined or even think that it is accurate. Their "depression" or "anxiety" or "ADHD" might not actually be the "problem" or might become an additional problem to the original one with time.

When people tell me that their "problem" is divorce, or anger or not getting enough sex I usually help them to understand that these things are usually the "result" of other problems. For example, divorce can be the result of not having a good relationship, anger could be the result of not having good coping skills to deal with life and "not getting enough sex" can be the result of poor communications or lack of intimacy.

People who have been diagnosed with anxiety or depression also can be focussing on treatment for what is not the underlying problem. There have been many employees and professionals, for example, who improved their work relationships or business practices and found that their "mental health" symptoms disappeared.

Please don't misunderstand me. A mental illness diagnosis can be a result of not being able to develop strategies to deal with original problems. But, they can also be given in error when a person is actually suffering from overwork, physical illnesses or inability to deal with loss.

I remember very clearly when a school official asked me to talk with a "rebellious" teen who had moved three days previously and refused to communicate or participate in class. His rebellion was revealed to be anger and sadness because his grandfather had died just before the move and the boy's father refused to take him to the funeral.

When people are referred to me for "anger management" I don't introduce a workbook or strategy. I want first of all want to know why the person is angry. The cause might lead the therapy in a totally different direction.

It's true that people can be misdiagnosed but, it is also important to know that when problems are not dealt with in a healthy manner, they can lead to mental illness. The key to good therapy therefore requires excellent assessment as well as appropriate intervention.