



Label Or Diagnosis?

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

Published

November 24th, 2008

Frequently I hear individuals state that they do not like to see people being "labeled" with a diagnosis. I find this a little difficult to understand as I like to be able to name the problems in my life before I try to deal with them.

For example, when my bank balance was lower than I expected, I was relieved to learn that an error had been made which resulted in double debits to my account. When my mechanic identified the problem with my car's air conditioning as being a broken switch, I knew that it could be fixed quickly and inexpensively. My doctor's pronouncement of bronchitis was happily received as I knew that with a few days of antibiotics I would feel much better.

I'm thankful when a diagnosis is given. It often relieves the fear and worries that accompany statements like "We don't know what's wrong".

There are several things that must be considered by those who do not like individuals being diagnosed.

First of all, diagnoses are based on sets of criteria that clearly and accurately describe a condition or disorder. The process is scientific. If there is evidence that the criteria is met - then the diagnosis can be given but if there isn't evidence of the criteria in a person's life - there won't be a diagnosis.

Secondly, professionals are trained and experienced in diagnosing. That doesn't mean that they are always one hundred percent right but it does mean that they have expertise in this area. If you are concerned about a diagnosis, however, you can seek a second opinion.

Thirdly, clients are assessed as unique individuals. They are seen by the psychiatrist, psychologist or physician in person. The information they provide to the profession is therefore given by the individual who is experiencing the symptoms. Responsibility therefore lies not only with the professional but also with the client who provides information that needs to be accurate and comprehensive.

Fourthly, there are specific treatments that have been proven to be effective for specific diagnoses. In fact, it is amazing how many options there are for each diagnosis. Some medications or treatments work better for clients than others but working with the professionals involved will usually result in an appropriate intervention.

Fifthly, there are many self-care activities which individuals can do to give them control and help their situation. My sister, for example, who has Multiple Sclerosis, knows that she does better when she has enough rest and doesn't allow her body to become too hot. When you get enough sleep, ensure proper nutrition, exercise, and follow the directions of physicians you will create better health for yourself.

Sixthly, in Canada we have many resources to help clients and their families to deal with the stress and problems that can accompany a diagnosis. Whether you have a physical or mental illness, there is a website, organization and therapy option for you. Even when a disorder or condition cannot be "cured", there are many things which can contribute to better manage of it. You might learn about these in a support group, brochure or workshop.

The key to healing is to have an appropriate assessment that will result in proper diagnosis. Once you have this, you can seek out the services and treatments which will help you to deal with it.