

What do you think are obstacles to patients receiving an accurate diagnosis?

Dr. Caroff:

There are probably a lot of reasons, a lot of obstacles. Unfortunately, there's the stigma of people having a mental illness of any kind. There's the stigma against ECT, which is restricted in some jurisdictions.

As mentioned about hospice patients, confusion with people with irreversible conditions and mistaking them for coma or something like that. And there's a lot of pressure. I know personally in hospitals on medical units in terms of turnover and bed utilization and things like that, that once they're finished medically with stabilizing the patient, even if they're not responsive or acting bizarrely, there's a push to move them on to the next setting. And reimbursement issues, I think those kinds of things are also an impediment, an obstacle to this.

I wanted to throw in nursing education, that a lot of mental health care is provided by nurse practitioners and physician assistants, and certainly nurses in hospitals. I think we shouldn't neglect trying to reach out to them and making them aware of catatonia, because they're the hands on people who see patients every day. And if they could recognize catatonia, that might also help facilitate proper treatment.