

Is catatonia an independent, unique disorder on its own?

Dr. Caroff:

Is catatonia an independent, unique disorder of its own, apart from these other conditions? That's a question I'm interested in.

It's more like at this point, it's something like, let's say congestive heart failure, perhaps, or dementia maybe is better. So dementia is a bunch of signs and symptoms of someone having problems with mental acuity, but it's a syndrome. It has certain signs and symptoms, but it can be caused by many different things. You have to figure out if they have Alzheimer's disease or frontotemporal dementia or a stroke or all kinds of different things. Catatonia's seen that way as a syndrome, but some conditions — anyway, maybe we should leave it at that, at this point in time.

Again, thanks to Drs. Fink and Taylor especially, catatonia is initially seen as a neuropsychiatric syndrome, a bunch of signs and symptoms that can be caused by a lot of different things that affect brain function. And your job is to figure out what's causing that. You can't always do that.

Sometimes you don't know. You can still treat it, but that's the way it's seen, whereas schizophrenia itself is felt to be a unique disease of its own that has a course and not only signs and symptoms, but has a certain course, certain response to treatment, and so forth.