
Reviewing Old Records for Newly Admitted Psychiatric Patients

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Introduction

We all know that it's important to give old records at least a cursory review before admitting new patients (or, depending on when you can get records, within the first few days of admission). But do you have a systematic and efficient method for doing this review? This fact sheet outlines key aspects to focus on when examining past records, especially discharge summaries, to ensure continuity and efficacy of care.

Reviewing Discharge Summaries

Hospital Course

- **Duration of Admission:** The length of the last admissions can help you predict the length of the current admission.
- **Cooperation with Treatment:** Assess how well the patient engaged with previous treatments. Did they take prescribed medications? Did they engage with discharge planning?
- **Response to Medications:**
 - What was the time course of response to medications?
 - Were any PRN medications especially effective? If so, try them again.
 - Were any medications clearly ineffective? If so, try something different this time.
- **Patient Participation:**
 - Were they active participants, going to groups and interacting with staff and peers? Or were they reluctant, staying in their room and resisting significant contact with anyone
- **Behavioral and Legal:**
 - Note any significant behavioral incidents, including the use of restraints, assaultive behavior, or self-harm. Unfortunately, past behaviors often predict future behaviors.
 - Was the patient involved in any civil commitment proceedings? What was the outcome?
- **Social and Family Dynamics**
- **Family/Friends Involvement:** Were family and friends involved in treatment? Perhaps you can engage these same supports in the current treatment episode.

Other Areas to Review

- **Previous Diagnoses and Differential Diagnoses:** Clarify any changes or consistencies in diagnoses over time to inform current diagnostic considerations.
- **Lab Results and Physical Examinations:** Look for trends or outstanding issues that might impact psychiatric treatment, such as thyroid dysfunction or substance use.
- **Therapist Notes and Psychotherapy Summaries:** These can provide insights into the patient's behavioral patterns, coping mechanisms, and progress in therapy.

Tips for Effective Record Review

- **Use a Systematic Approach:** Develop a checklist based on the above points to ensure no critical information is overlooked.
- **Integrate Findings into Current Care:** Discuss historical insights in multidisciplinary team meetings to ensure all aspects of the patient's historical care inform current treatment plans.
- **Document Key Findings:** Clearly document significant historical data in the patient's current chart for easy reference by all care providers.