

Psychiatric History of Presenting Illness Mnemonic

To the Editor: It is essential for individuals in the medical and psychiatric fields to be skilled in obtaining a psychiatric history. During my training at the University of Toronto, my preceptor, Dr Gerald Shugar, introduced the 6 Ss: Start, Setting, Stressors, Symptoms, Sequelae, and Supports.

Over the years, I have adopted and modified the 6 Ss to develop a mnemonic that has evolved into its current version, which is still used by my trainees and referring physicians from other specialties. To aid in taking a comprehensive psychiatric history of presenting illness (HPI), I developed the following mnemonic device: the “Psychiatric HPI 9 Ss.” Each letter

represents an essential part of the psychiatric HPI, as follows:

1. Start
2. State: circumstances of the event
3. Stressors: bio-psycho-social
4. Symptoms: bio-psycho-social
5. Sychosis
6. Suicide
7. Substance: prescribed and illegal
8. State of function: current
9. Systems review: other psychiatric diagnoses

The 9 Ss are easily remembered and can be utilized by students, residents, psychiatrists, and other clinicians to facilitate the organized collection of relevant

information when obtaining the psychiatric HPI.

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Article Information

Published Online: July 18, 2024.

<https://doi.org/10.4088/PCC.23lr03699>

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Prim Care Companion CNS Disord 2024;26(4):23lr03699

To Cite: Aljeshi AA. Psychiatric history of presenting illness mnemonic. *Prim Care Companion CNS Disord*. 2024; 26(4):23lr03699.

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Relevant Financial Relationships: None.

Funding/Support: None.