# Functional Ophthalmic Disorders

Ocular Malingering and Visual Hysteria

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#### Introduction

Patients usually visit a healthcare provider because of specific signs or symptoms. In the general course of events, the provider:

- · Conducts an examination and testing.
- Discovers an objective finding that explains the symptoms.
- · Makes a diagnosis.
- Institutes appropriate treatment.
- Follows the patient over time, anticipating symptoms will improve.

Less often—and more frustrating for all—the provider does *not* discover an objective finding that leads to a diagnosis of an organic illness that explains the symptoms. In such a case, providers adopt a policy of watchful waiting, traditionally known as the "tincture of time." Time permits the symptoms of a minor malady to disappear. Time also allows for the development of an abnormal finding that eventually enables a diagnosis.

However, in *some* cases, time convinces a provider to consider the diagnosis of a *functional disorder*. In a functional disorder, the patient has symptoms or signs of illness, but there is *no* evidence of organic disease. The challenge is then to diagnose the type of functional disorder and prescribe the proper treatment and follow-up. The process is complicated because a functional disorder can overlay an organic illness and a small percentage of functional disorders ultimately are linked to an underlying medical etiology.

This treatise briefly reviews the historical and contemporary thought on functional disorders in general, functional ophthalmic disorders in particular, and provides a "how-to" manual on diagnostic testing for the different types of functional ophthalmic disorders.

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### **Contents**

1	Teri	ninology of Functional Disorders	1
	1.1	Nomenclature	1
	1.2	Simple Classification of Functional Disorders	2
	1.3	Types of Conscious Functional Disorders	
		(Traditional Malingering)	3
	1.4	Types of Unconscious Functional Disorders	
		(Traditional Hysteria)	4
	1.5	Ophthalmic Functional Disorders	4
	1.6	DSM-5 and MeSH Classification of Functional Disorders	5
	1.7	Terminology in This Text	7
	Refe	erences	8
2	Hiet	ory of Functional Disorders	11
_	2.1	History of Hysteria	11
	2.2	History of Ocular Hysteria	16
	2.3	History of Malingering	20
	2.4	History of Visual Malingering	24
		prences	26
3	-	terical Ocular Functional Disorders	33
	3.1	Definition and Overview	33
	3.2	Epidemiology	34
	3.3	Natural History	36
	3.4	Risk Factors and Etiology	37
	3.5	Signs and Symptoms	39
		3.5.1 Overview of Signs and Symptoms	39
		3.5.2 Visual Acuity	41
		3.5.3 Visual Fields	42
		3.5.4 Disturbances of Sensibility	47

viii Contents

		3.5.5	Disturbances of Light and Color	47
		3.5.6	Systemic Symptoms with Proclaimed Ocular Cause	48
	3.6	Treatn	nent	48
	Refe	rences.		50
4	Ocu	lar Mal	lingering	55
	4.1		tion and Overview	56
	4.2		miology of General Malingering	56
	4.3		miology of Ocular Malingering	58
	4.4	_	al History	58
	4.5		Factors and Etiology	59
	4.6		and Symptoms	60
		4.6.1	General Malingering Signs and Symptoms	60
		4.6.2	Overview of Ocular Malingering Signs and Symptoms	60
	4.7	Treatn	nent	66
	Refe	rences.		67
5	Diff	erentiat	ting Ocular Functional Disorders:	
_			ersus Malingering	71
	5.1		re a Need to Differentiate Type	
			cular Functional Disorder"?	71
		5.1.1	The Rationale for Limiting Diagnosis	
			to Ocular Functional Disorder	72
		5.1.2	The Rationale for Distinguishing the Type	
			of Ocular Functional Disorder	73
	5.2	Differe	entiation of Malingering from Hysteria	74
	5.3	The Re	ole or Need for Referral to Ophthalmic Specialists	76
	5.4	The Re	ole or Need for Referral to Psychiatry	76
	Refe			78
6	Ove	rview o	f the Clinician-Patient Interaction	81
•	6.1		linician's Conduct	81
	0.1	6.1.1	Preparation	81
		6.1.2	Attitude	82
		6.1.3	Therapeutic Encounter	82
		6.1.4	Minimize Patient Exaggeration	82
		6.1.5	Interview Style	83
		6.1.6	Obtaining Evidence	83
		6.1.7	How to Talk to Patients About Their Diagnosis	83
	6.2		atient's Conduct	84
		6.2.1	Affect	84
		6.2.2	General Behavior	84
	6.3		ledical Report	85
	6.4		nony/Medicolegal Issues	86
			iony/medicologia issues	86

Contents ix

7	Tech	nniques	and Tests for Functional Ophthalmic Disorders	89
	7.1	Gener	al Overview	89
	7.2	Princi	ples Used in Examination	90
	7.3		Illustration of Tests	91
	7.4		sted Order of Tests	92
		7.4.1	Testing for Functional Binocular Blindness	92
		7.4.2	Testing for Functional Monocular Blindness	93
	7.5	Testin	g for Functional Binocular Decreased Vision	93
		7.5.1	Testing for Functional Monocular Decreased Vision	94
	Refe	erences.		94
8	Test	ing for	Functional Total Blindness	95
	8.1	Tests 1	Based on Normal Physiology/Fixation Reflexes	95
		8.1.1	Pupillary Responses	95
		8.1.2	Optokinetic Nystagmus Test	96
		8.1.3	Mirror Test	96
		8.1.4	The Threat Reaction or Menace Reflex	98
		8.1.5	Sudden Strong Focal Illumination	99
		8.1.6	The Head-Rotation: Doll's Eyes	
			(Oculovestibular Nystagmus)	99
	8.2	Tests 1	Based on Subjective Examiner Perception	99
		8.2.1	Avoidance of Obstacles	99
		8.2.2	Signature Writing	100
		8.2.3	The Shock or Startle Card Test	100
		8.2.4	Making Sudden Ridiculous Facial Expressions	100
		8.2.5	The Schmidt-Rimpler Test	101
	8.3	Tests 1	Based on Prisms	102
		8.3.1	General Principles of Prism Tests	102
		8.3.2	Objective Fixation Test with Six-Diopter	
			Base Out Prism	105
	8.4	Tests 1	Based on Electrophysiology	106
		8.4.1	Electroencephalography	106
		8.4.2	Visual Evoked Potential	106
		8.4.3	Psychogalvanic Reflex	107
	Refe	erences.		107
9	Test	s for Si	mulation of Monocular Blindness	111
	9.1	Tests	Based on Normal Physiologic Reflexes	112
		9.1.1	Tests Based on Induced Diplopia with Prism Manipulation	112
		9.1.2	Manually Induced and Physiologic Diplopia	118
	9.2	Tests 1	Based on Subjective Examiner Perception	119
	•	9.2.1	Observation	119
		9.2.2	Patient Response to Simple Office Techniques	-
			Mainly Based on Refractive and Sensory Trickery	119

x Contents

	9.3	Binocular Visual Field Examination	129
			132
		9.3.2 The Goldman Perimeter	133
		9.3.3 Two Alternative, Forced-Choice (2AFC) Procedure 1	133
	Refe	rences1	134
10	Tecto	s for Decreased Vision	137
10	10.1		138
	10.1		138
			138
	10.2		139
	10.2	3	139
			139 139
	10.3		139 139
	10.5	10.3.1 Down Up Refraction, Doctor Killing	133
		•	120
		` /	139 141
	10.4	•	141
	10.4	1 3 63 6	145
		10.4.1 Visual Evoked Potential (VEP)	
		1 /	145
			146
	10.5		146
	10.5	•	147
		<b>3</b>	147
	D (		149
	Refe	rences 1	150
11	Tests	s for Miscellaneous Functional Visual Complaints 1	153
	11.1	Testing for Functional Visual Field Complaints	154
		11.1.1 Tangent Field (Bjerrum) Screen 1	154
		11.1.2 Goldmann Perimetry	156
		11.1.3 Amsler Grid 1	158
		11.1.4 Scanning Laser Ophthalmoscopy (SLO) 1	159
	11.2	Test for Simulation of Night-Blindness	159
	11.3	Tests for Visual Hallucinations	160
	11.4	Tests for Binocular Vision	160
	11.5	Tests for the Simulation of Diplopia	162
	11.6		162
	11.7		164
	Refe		167
12			
12	12.1		169 160
	12.1	E	169 169
		Č	109 170
		14.1.4 VISUAL PICIU EXAM WITH COMMENTERS COMMENTS	ı/IJ

Contents xi

12.2	Night V	ision	171
	12.2.1	Wright's Test for Night Vision	171
	12.2.2	British Army Night Vision Test	171
	12.2.3	Harman's Disk Spotting Night-Vision Test	172
	12.2.4	Dark Adaptation	174
	12.2.5	Trick Tests	174
12.3	Sensory	Trickery with Color and Optical Illusion	177
	12.3.1	James Minor Color Test to Prove Vision	
		in Functional Monocular Blindness	177
	12.3.2	Wessely Two Candle: Functional	
		Monocular Blindness	178
	12.3.3	Thibaudet Visual Acuity Illusion	178
12.4	Sensory	Trickery via Operator Dexterity	179
	12.4.1	Herter's Method for Functional Monocular Blindness	179
	12.4.2	Beaumont Variation of Herter's Method	
		for Functional Monocular Blindness	179
12.5	Sensory	Trickery via Light Polarization Properties	180
	12.5.1	Brackup Polaroid <sup>TM</sup> Split Chart	180
	12.5.2	Polaroid Film and Glasses	180
12.6	Sensory	Trickery with Prisms (Binocular Vision/Diplopia)	180
	12.6.1	Reverse Jackson, Two-Perpendicular-Cylinders Test	180
	12.6.2	Galezowski's Birefractive Prism	181
	12.6.3	Priestly Smith's Modification of Von Weltz's	
		Modification for Binocular Blindness	181
	12.6.4	Monoyer's Double Prism	182
	12.6.5	Other Prism Induced Diplopia Tests	
		of Historical Interest	182
	12.6.6	Wick of Berlin	183
	12.6.7	Baudry's Method (Variation of Split Prism Test,	
		Von Graefe's Split Fixation)	183
	12.6.8	Baudon's Method	184
12.7	Sensory	Trickery with Image Manipulation I:	
	Various	Haploscopes	185
	12.7.1	Crossed Images from Crossed Tubes	185
	12.7.2	Crossed Images from a Diaphragm Apparatus	186
	12.7.3	Manipulated Images from Pseudoscopes	188
	12.7.4	Amblyoscopes	192
	12.7.5	Modification of Javal-Cuignet Device	194
12.8	Sensory	Trickery with Image Manipulation II: Stereoscope	195
	12.8.1	Schweigger Stereoscopic Tests	196
	12.8.2	The Vieusse Test	199
	12.8.3	Baudry Stereoscopic Test	199
	12.8.4	Interrupted Reading on Stereoscopic Tests	200
	12.8.5	Hoor's Modification	201

xii Contents

		12.8.6	Beaumont Stereoscopic Test Suggestions	202
		12.8.7	Complementary Colors (Schenk's Test)	202
		12.8.8	Burchardt	202
		12.8.9	Straub	203
	12.9	Method	Is and Tips for Measuring Visual Acuity	204
		12.9.1	Changing Distance to Test Chart with Mirrors	204
		12.9.2	Changing Size of Optotype on Lines of Charts	204
		12.9.3	Patient Patterns of Error on Acuity Testing	205
		12.9.4	Trick Acuity Testing for Complaints	
			of Presbyopia or Monocular Blindness	205
		12.9.5	Recognition of Familiar Objects	206
		12.9.6	Shuffled Individual Letters	206
	Refer	ences		207
Inda	ρV			211

# **Chapter 1 Terminology of Functional Disorders**

**Abstract** In a functional disorder, the patient has symptoms or signs of illness, but there is no evidence of natural physical disease. After ruling out an organic cause for symptoms, the provider determines if the functional disorder is a conscious effort by the patient to cause the signs and symptoms (traditionally called malingering) or an unconscious occurrence of signs and symptoms produced by the unconscious mind (traditionally called hysteria). The terminology of functional disorders and their subtypes has evolved over time. Formal classification systems include those in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) and Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) of the National Library of Medicine.

**Keywords** Hysteria • Malingering • Nonorganic disease • Functional ophthalmic disorders • Ophthalmic functional overlay • Nomenclature • Ocular malingering • Visual hysteria • Conversion disorder

#### 1.1 Nomenclature

Functional disorders (FD) refer to any disorder where symptoms or signs of disease occur but there is no evidence of organic disease. There has been long debate and evolution of the nomenclature used to describe these disorders, which complicates understanding the conditions (Bury, 1896; Ransom, 1895). Alternate terms in the literature for these disorders include "nonorganic disease" (Miller, 2004; Waddell & Richardson, 1980), "medically unexplained symptoms" (Deary, Chalder, & Sharpe, 2007; Jones & Wessely, 2005; O'Brien, 1998; Smith & Swamena, 2001; Werring, Weston, Bullmore, Plant, & Ron, 2004), and abnormal illness behavior (Prior & Bond, 2008).

Somatic symptoms and related disorders is the term for the redefined, pertinent category in the fifth and most recent edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) published by the American Psychiatric Association) (APA, 2013). The continued evolution of the terminology is generally a reliable sign that there has never been satisfaction with the nomenclature (Greco, 2012). This is one of the reasons, as discussed in Sec. 1.7, this text frequently will use the historical terms of hysteria and malingering.

1

An additional factor in the confusion over the concept of functional disorders is that names of the *subtypes* of functional disorders continue to change over time. These changes frequently coincide with new editions of the DSM ("DSM: History of the Manual," n.d.). For instance, the somatization disorder of DSM-IV-TR is now referred to as somatic symptom disorder in DSM-5, and similarly hypochondriasis is now called illness anxiety disorder (APA, 2000, 2013). Not surprisingly, the evolving DSM terminology is not accepted with universal enthusiasm (Frances, 2013).

#### 1.2 Simple Classification of Functional Disorders

A World War II era physician offered his version of a clear-cut distinction between malingering and hysteria. "The malingerer lies, the other tells what he believes to be the truth, although it may be true that neither wants to return to duty." (Unsworth, 1945). Functional disorders, like all diseases, occur across a spectrum, but it is easier to grasp that spectrum if one has a thorough understanding of either end of the span of disease.

It is oversimplistic but useful to sort functional disorders into two ends of a spectrum: *conscious* and *unconscious*. The malingerer is conscious of his deception. The hysteric is not (Fig. 1.1).

In the conscious category (historically called malingering), the patient intentionally manufactures signs and symptoms of disease to achieve a specific benefit or to avoid an undesirable circumstance. In the unconscious category (historically called hysteria), the patient's mind unconsciously deals with untenable circumstances by producing symptoms and signs of organic illness in an attempt to escape the untenable situation. The symptoms are very real to the patient; they are not consciously created.

Symptoms and Signs without Organic Disease		
CONSCIOUS MANUFACTURE OF SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS (Traditional Malingering)	UNCONSCIOUS MANIFESTATION OF SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS (Traditional Hysteria)	
TYPES and MOTIVATION	TYPES	
Malingering – Secondary Gain from the Semblance of Illness	Conversion Disorder	
Factitious Disease - The Illness Experience	Illness Anxiety Disorder	
	Somatic Symptom Disorder	

Fig. 1.1 Categorization of functional disorders

One of the reasons various authors prefer terms such as "nonorganic disease" or "medically unexplained symptoms" is that these labels are more descriptive of the phenomenon than the more nebulous "functional" label. Many also use these general diagnostic categories as the most specific level of diagnosis to be made in functional disorders and make no determination or judgment about the conscious or unconscious intent on the part of the patient. In fact, this school of thought believes it frequently impossible and/or inadvisable to make such a judgment (Beatty, 1999; Griffiths & Eddyshaw, 2004). Many emphasize the indisputable fact that, like all disease, the spectrum of functional disorders occurs across a continuum and therefore precise categories and sometimes arbitrary labels do not apply (Cunnien, 1988).

Other authors emphasize the need to sort out the intent of the patient when possible. "Understanding the patient's motivation or incentive ... and the degree to which he or she is conscious of it may be the most difficult part of the diagnostic process, but it may be the most crucial." (Miller, 2004). It is not always necessary or recommended to apprise the patient of every nuance of the diagnosis, particularly with regard to the patient's motivation, but when possible, reaching a more detailed level of diagnosis in the examiner's mind is important in decisions regarding appropriate disposition of the patient.

# 1.3 Types of Conscious Functional Disorders (Traditional Malingering)

Factitious disorder refers to the psychiatric condition in which the patient deliberately produces the illusion of illness for the sole purpose of assuming the sick role. The older terminology for this condition is Munchausen Syndrome, or Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy, when a person with the disorder victimizes a child (Bauer & Boegner, 1996; Elwyn & Ahmed, 2006; Kalivas, 1996).

*Malingering* is the conscious production of false or exaggerated symptoms motivated by external incentives, such as obtaining compensation or drugs, avoiding work or military duty, or evading criminal prosecution (APA, 2013). Some authors believe it may be a manifestation of an underlying personality disorder (Kucharski, Toomey, Fila, & Duncan, 2007; Spratt & DeMaso, 2006). The term malingering usually refers to the concept of *positive malingering*: creating symptoms of a disease that is not really present. *Negative malingering*, where a patient attempts to hide the signs and symptoms of actual organic disease, is less common (Duke-Elder & Abrams, 1970).

# 1.4 Types of Unconscious Functional Disorders (Traditional Hysteria<sup>1</sup>)

Somatization disorder is a chronic condition with physical complaints in more than one part of the body in persons younger than 30 years of age and results in unnecessary medical treatment, causes significant impairment in functioning, or both ("Somatization Disorder (Briquet Syndrome)," 2012; Spratt & DeMaso, 2006).

Conversion disorder is a loss of neurologic sensory or physical function, usually quite suddenly at times of psychological stress and not fully explained by organic disease (Marsden, 1986; Nason, 1994).

Hypochondriasis is a disorder characterized by unexplained physiologic symptoms related to fear of a specific medical condition, such as a complaint of a headache perceived as being due to a brain tumor when all investigations show that there is no tumor present. Hypochondriacal patients worry that symptoms portend serious illness and have difficulty accepting reassurance (Barsky et al., 2001; Cely-Serrano & Floet, 2006; Hilty, Marks, Bourgeois, & Yellowlees, 2005).

Pain disorder is a focused pain complaint that cannot be entirely attributed to a specific medical disorder. Criteria of pain disorder include the following: (1) Pain in one or more anatomical sites producing a predominant clinical focus, (2) Psychological factors felt to play an important role in the onset, severity, or course of the pain, and (3) Pain symptom that is not feigned or intentionally produced (Main, 2003; Protagoras-Lianos, 2006; Yates, 2005).

Body Dysmorphic Disorder is a condition where the patient focuses on a physical defect that is not evident to others. Specific characterizations of body dysmorphic disorder include the following: (1) Preoccupation with an imagined defect in appearance. (2) May be associated with multiple, frantic, and unsuccessful attempts to correct imagined defect by cosmetic surgery (Bjornsson, Didie, & Phillips, 2010; Ericksen & Billick, 2012).

Functional Overlay is a situation where the patient has organic illness but also has functional symptoms unexplained by the organic illness (Agatston, 1944; Bromberg, 1979; Fava, 1996; Main & Spanswick, 1995; Spaeth, 1930; Walsh & Hoyt, 1969; Weinberger, 1979).

#### 1.5 Ophthalmic Functional Disorders

This publication will concentrate on functional disorders where there are specific visual or ocular symptoms without any apparent pathology.

Ocular malingering is the conscious manufacture of ocular symptoms, most often poor vision, in the absence of any apparent pathology with the goal of gaining

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>Many of these terms were recently eliminated, reclassified, or renamed in DSM-V. They are included here as the terms exist throughout the medical literature.

some compensation or avoiding some responsibility (Agatston, 1944; Kramer, La Piana, & Appleton, 1979; Spaeth, 1930).

Visual Hysteria is a subconscious process where an ocular symptom and/or diminished visual acuity occurs and cannot be explained on an organic basis. With reassurance and occasional psychiatric evaluation and treatment, it often reverts to normal (Barris, Kaufman, & Barberio, 1992; Keane, 1982; Krill & Newell, 1968).

Ophthalmic Functional Overlay is a condition where abnormal structural ophthalmologic or neuroophthalmologic findings exist but there are visual loss and/or other ocular symptoms either out of proportion to or unexplained by the abnormality noted on the examination (Lim, Siatkowski, & Farris, 2005).

#### 1.6 DSM-5 and MeSH Classification of Functional Disorders

As mentioned in Sect. 1.2 Nomenclature of Functional Disorders, the lexicon of functional disorders has evolved over time. The APA is the main organization that defines, standardizes, and updates the concepts of functional disorders. The APA first published a categorization of mental disorders in 1952 in the DSM ("DSM: History of the Manual," n.d.). The most recent edition, DSM-5, includes the corresponding diagnostic codes from the ninth and tenth International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-9 and ICD-10) (APA, 2013; Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services 2014a).

ICD is the standardized system of diagnoses developed by the World Health Organization and modified for use by most countries, including the United States of America (USA) (World Health Organization, n.d.). Implementation of ICD-10 codes was planned in the USA for the Fall of 2014, but has recently been postponed to 2015 (Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, 2014b). Table 1.1 adapts and summarizes pertinent information from DSM-5 on the categories of mental disease pertinent to functional disorders.

The National Library of Medicine standardizes medical terminology in its "controlled vocabulary thesaurus" called Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) (U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2013). It places medical terms in a hierarchy that assists with searching medical databases. The MeSH terminology concerning various functional disorders is helpful because it includes terms used in the preceding decades that are not all included in DSM-5 (U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2012a, b) (see Table 1.2).

Table 1.1 DSM-5 classification, criteria, and coding of functional disorders

ICD-9	ICD-10*	Somatic Symptom and Related Disorders (309)
300.82	F45.1	Somatic Symptom Disorder  With predominant pain and/or persistent; mild, moderate, or severe
300.7	F45.1	Illness Anxiety Disorder Care seeking or care avoidant type
300.11		Conversion Disorder (Functional Neurological Symptom Disorder)
	F44.4	With weakness or paralysis, abnormal movement, swallowing symptoms, or speech symptom
	F44.5	With attacks or seizures
	F44.6	With anesthesia, sensory loss, or special sensory symptom
	F44.7	With mixed symptoms, acute episode or persistent, with psychological stressor, or without psychological stressor
316	F54	Psychological Factors Affecting Other Medical Conditions (mild, moderate, severe, extreme)
300.19	F68.10	Factitious Disorder  (includes Factitious Disorder imposed on self and Factitious Disorder imposed on Another; single episode or recurrent episodes)
300.89	F45.8	Specified Somatic Symptom And Related Disorder
300.82	F45.9	Unspecified Somatic Symptom And Related Disorder
		Other Conditions That May be a Focus of Clinical Attention
Sectio	n 726, Oth	er Circumstances of Personal History, Nonadherence to Medical Treatment
V65.2	(Z76.5)	Malingering

<sup>--</sup>adapted from American Psychiatric Association: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition. Arlington, VA, American Psychiatric Association, 2013.

<sup>\*</sup> ICD-10 code sets will be implemented October, 2014. http://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Coding/ICD10/index.html accessed Nov 22, 2013.

Table 1.2 Selected portions of MeSH tree related to functional disorders

Table 1.2 Selected portions of Westi free related to functional disorders		
Behavior and Behavior I	Mechanisms [F01]	
MALINGERING [F01.145.126.925] Mental Disorders [F03]	Scope note: simulation of symptoms of illness or injury with intent to deceive in order to obtain a goal, e.g., claiming illness to avoid jury duty	
FACTITIOUS DISORDERS [F03.400]	Scope note: disorders characterized by physical or psychological symptoms that are not real, genuine, or natural  Differentiate from <i>somatoform disorders</i> : factitious are physical or psychological symptoms under voluntary control, somatoform are physical symptoms linked to psychological factors but not under voluntary control	
MUNCHAUSEN SYNDROME [F03.400.600]	Scope note: a factitious disorder characterized by habitual presentation for hospital treatment of an apparent acute illness, the patient giving a plausible and dramatic history, all of which is false Disease symptoms fabricated by a person seeking hospitalization repeatedly; <i>Munchausen by Proxy</i> <sup>a</sup> is available	
SOMATOFORM DISORDERS [F03.875]	Scope note: (1) Disorders having the presence of physical symptoms that suggest a general medical condition but that are not fully explained by a general medical condition, by the direct effects of a substance, or by another mental disorder. The symptoms must cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other areas of functioning. In contrast to <i>factitious disorders</i> and <i>malingering</i> , the physical symptoms are not under voluntary control ( <i>APA</i> , <i>DSM-iV</i> ). (2) Pain disorder. (3) Somatization disorder Differentiate from <i>factitious</i> and <i>psychophysiologic disorders</i>	
BODY DYSMORPHIC DISORDERS [F03.875.149]	Scope note: preoccupations with appearance or self-image causing significant distress or impairment in important areas of functioning	
CONVERSION DISORDER [F03.875.300]	Scope note: a disorder whose predominant feature is a loss or alteration in physical functioning that suggests a physical disorder but is actually an expression of a psychological conflict or need Use Cat F3 qualif; X ref <i>globus hystericus</i> : of psychogenic origin but globus sensation of nonpsychogenic origin is indexed under deglutition disorders or specific organ/dis or other disease heading	
HYPOCHONDRIASIS [F03.875.450]	Scope note: preoccupation with the fear of having, or the idea that one has, a serious disease based on the person's misinterpretation of bodily symptoms ( <i>APA</i> , <i>DSM-IV</i> )	
NEURASTHENIA [F03.875.600]	Scope note: a mental disorder characterized by chronic fatigue and concomitant physiologic symptoms  Remember also <i>neurocirculatory asthenia</i> exists	

U.S. National Library of Medicine (2012a, b)

#### 1.7 Terminology in This Text

At a meeting of the Wigan Medical Society in 1896, a physician from Manchester, England, addressed the assembly on the topic of distinguishing *functional* from *organic* disease. Judson S. Bury spent the initial 20 % of his address discussing shortcomings of the terminology, but then he conceded. "In my further remarks,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>a</sup>Munchausen by Proxy not included in mental or behavioral; under social sciences/sociology/ social welfare/child welfare/child abuse (Ref NLM, MeSH, Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy)

however, *I must use for the sake of convenience* the terms 'functional' and 'organic' in their usually understood sense." (Bury, 1896).

During the writing of this text, the authors struggled with a way to refer to the subtypes of functional disease traditionally understood as hysteria and malingering. The goal was to be uniform throughout the text and to use terms that would not distract the reader from the discussion of important details of these disorders. Category names such as conscious and unconscious make it easier to understand motivational aspects of the disorders, but become cumbersome in a long discussion of functional disorders.

We ultimately conceded. Even though the terms have fallen out of disfavor, *for the sake of convenience*, we humbly follow the lead of W.M. Beaumont and Sir Stewart Duke-Elder and frequently use the terms "*hysteria*" and "*malingering*" in their usually understood sense.

Lastly, this text arbitrarily uses masculine pronouns in reference to individuals such as the examiner or the patient, and the term 'ophthalmologist' for the examiner, though the testing and techniques are useful for any eye care professional. In discussion of a patient with suspected functional monocular ophthalmic disease, the patient's eye with the alleged ocular problem will be called the "bad eye" and the eye that is not the subject of the patient's complaint will be called the "good eye."

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