

How to use patient-centered language in documentation

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During psychiatric documentation, consider using language you would like used to describe yourself or a loved one

As psychiatric care transitions to using electronic medical records, providers should be aware that patients—and their legal representation—have increasing access to their medical records. Use of patient-centered, nonjudgmental language will better preserve the physician/patient alliance.

Consider the type of language you would find acceptable in documents describing the care provided to you or a

loved one. Whenever possible, describe behavior by using objective and phenomenological terms. Nothing is sacrificed by replacing words that carry a negative connotation with less charged words. However, it is acceptable—and can add to the evaluation—to quote the patient's own words.

The *Table* below lists alternative terms and phrases for use in psychiatric documentation.

Table

Nonjudgmental language for psychiatric documentation

Language with negative connotation

Patient-centered language

Language with negative connotation	Patient-centered language
Promiscuity	Impulsive sexual behavior
Self-mutilation	Nonsuicidal self-injury
Manipulative, 'gamey'	The patient sought to meet their need of... (or describe specific behaviors)
Refused medication	Declined or chose not to accept medication
Nasty, rude, mean	The patient used offensive language. The patient behaved in an aggressive manner by...
Trigger	Prompt
Demanding	Made repeated requests
Noncompliant	Did not adhere to the treatment plan
Frantic, desperate	Urgent, acute, demonstrated intense feelings of...
Disturbed, dysfunctional	Dysregulated, difficult to manage
Needy	Sought reassurance
Failed medication trial	Treatment with this medication was not associated with improvement
Shopping spree	Impulsive spending behavior
The patient complains of...	The patient reported...
Drug binge	Heavy substance use over a short period

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