

Should the use of 'endorse' be endorsed in writing in psychiatry?

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The word "endorse" often appears in the medical literature and is heard in oral presentations; psychiatrists use the term to mean that a person *is reporting psychiatric symptoms or problems*. However, such usage may be a stylistic catachresis—one that has the potential for misinterpretation or misunderstanding.

Finding 'endorse' in the psychiatric literature

We conducted a literature search to identify instances of "endorse" in scholarly articles published in psychiatric journals between January 1, 2012, and November 25, 2013. *Table 1*¹⁻¹⁴ shows examples of typical uses of "endorse" in recent publications.

Even when "endorse" is used as a synonym for "report" or "describe," use of the word in that context can seem out of place. We could not find any rationale in the medical literature for using "endorse" as a synonym for "report" or "describe."

The definition of "endorse" in Merriam-Webster¹⁵ and Oxford Dictionaries¹⁶ includes:

- inscribing or signing a legal document, check, or bill
- approving or recommending an idea, product, or candidate.

We believe that using "endorse" in a psychiatric context could create confusion among medical trainees and professionals who are familiar with the correct meanings of the word.

Survey: Some residents use 'endorse' in oral presentations

We asked residents in the Department of Psychiatry at Drexel University College of Medicine to respond to a questionnaire regarding their understanding of the use of "endorse." Their responses are summarized in *Table 2*.

What is wrong with using 'endorse'?

Except when "endorse" describes a patient formally affixing her (his) signature to a document for the purpose of (1) certification or (2) giving or showing one's support for a cause, we think that use of the word in psychiatry is not in keeping with its formal, accepted definition. Furthermore, residents' responses to our survey suggest that there is the danger of causing confusion in using the word "endorse" when "report" or "describe" is meant.

For example, if a patient "endorses" antisocial behavior, is she stating that she feels justified in exhibiting such behavior? Do students who "endorse" drug use approve of drug use? Another example: Youth who "endorse" gang membership have merely confirmed that they belonged to a gang at some time.

continued



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The authors report no financial relationship with any company whose products are mentioned in this article or with manufacturers of competing products.



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Clinical Point

Use 'report,' 'express,' or similar words to describe a patient's statement or report of symptoms or experiences, instead of 'endorse'



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Table 1

'Endorse' in the recent psychiatric literature

When a patient describes symptoms or feelings...

- "... endorse experiencing less pleasure"¹
- "She did not overtly endorse Criterion B for [anorexia nervosa]"²
- "... endorse contemplating suicide"³
- "... did not endorse an improvement in mood"⁴
- "... endorse higher overall numbers of symptoms"⁵
- "... endorse symptoms of emotional distress"⁶
- "... endorsed some experience of suicidality"⁷
- "... endorse near-constant intrusive obsessions"⁸
- "... endorse childhood ADHD symptoms"⁹
- "... endorse more than one symptom type [of OCD]"¹⁰

When a patient or caregiver signs (ie, endorses) her (his) name on a formal checklist or scale as part of a study...

- "... endorsed memory or behavior problems"¹¹
- "Caregivers of DLB patients were more likely than AD caregivers to endorse behaviors such as diminished emotional responsiveness, apathy ..."¹²

Other uses

- "Gang members had to endorse gang membership"¹³
- "Students who endorse [drug use]..."¹⁴

Examples are the result of a search of the Summon Service database (ProQuest) for the word "endorse" in major psychiatric journals published in English between January 1, 2012, and November 25, 2013.

AD: Alzheimer's disease; ADHD: attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder; DLB: dementia with Lewy bodies; OCD: obsessive-compulsive disorder

The intended meaning of "endorse" in these examples is probably closer to "admit" or "acknowledge." The patient replies "yes" when the physician asks if she uses drugs or has had behavior problems; she is not necessarily recommending or approving these behaviors.

Usage is shifting. In the past, "complain" was common medical parlance for a patient's report of symptoms or other health-related problems. In fact, medical, surgical, and psychiatric evaluations still begin with a "chief complaint" section. It's possible that, because "complaint" might suggest that the patient is whining, the word fell out of favor in the medical lexicon and was replaced in the scholarly literature by the construction "the patient reports...."

Avoid jargon. Employ accurate terminology

We propose that "endorse," like "complain," is a cant of psychiatrists. We recommend

that, when describing a patient's statement or report of symptoms or experiences, practitioners should avoid "endorse" and write or say "report," "express," "exhibit," or similar words. Using accurate terminology and avoiding imprecise or misleading jargon is not only linguistically appropriate but also can help avoid misunderstanding and improve patient care.

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Table 2

Responses to a survey of psychiatry residents on the use of 'endorse'

Questions	Responses (N = 15) ^a
Have you heard your mentors and/or attending use the word "endorse"?	
Yes	11
No	4
At what level of your training did you first hear the word "endorse" used, if ever?	
Before residency (high school, medical school, observership, etc.)	11
PGY-1	2
PGY-2	1
Never	1
What is your understanding of the meaning of the word "endorse" as it is used in the sentence, "Patient endorses depressed mood and suicidal ideation"?	
"Reports," "has," "expresses," "acknowledges," or "admits to"	8
"Exhibits subjectively"	2
"Supports [the] physician observation of patient's signs/symptoms"	1
"Doesn't make sense [in this context]"	3
"Don't know"	1
Why do you use the word "endorse"?	
To mean "report," "have," acknowledge," or "feel"	5
Heard it used by supervisors/attendings and assumed it was "medical jargon" or understood to mean "report"	3
Denied use	7
If you questioned the meaning of the word, and felt that it was not a correct use of the word, did you ever feel uncomfortable utilizing this word in verbal presentations?	
Yes	6
No	9
Have you ever substituted another word for "endorse" because you did not wish to use the word?	
Yes	11
No	4

^aPGY-4 = 4; PGY-3 = 3; PGY-2 = 5; PGY-1 = 3

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Clinical Point

Using accurate terminology and avoiding imprecise or misleading jargon can help avoid misunderstanding and improve care