Making the Diagnostic Impression: factors to consider

When using the DSM-V to develop a “diagnostic impression,” the first item you will notice under any named disorder is Diagnostic Criteria listing what defines the disorder, constitutes or differentiates it from other disorders with similar symptomology. Next you will see “specify whether” to identify specifically predominate features that do or do not exist in making and accurate diagnostic impression. For example,

**Adjustment Disorders** (p. 286)

Diagnostic Criteria

A. The development of . . .
B. These symptoms or behaviors are clinically significant, as evidenced by . . .
   1. Marked distress . . .
   2. Significant impairment . . .
C. The stress-related disturbance . . .
D. The symptoms do not . . .
E. Once the stressor . . .

Following this basic outline you will see narratives with examples discussing further contributing factors and showing differences in disorders with similar symptoms. Usually you will see a Differential Diagnosis expounding this more in detail.

One the most overused diagnostic impressions is the Adjustment Disorder. It is easy to say that any kind of stressor can cause a disordered adjustment of sorts, but does this meet the criteria of the DSM-V. Consider what is criteria:

A. The ONSET of symptoms in an identifiable time frame
B. CLINICAL SIGNIFICANCE evidenced by one or more subsets
C. DOES NOT MEET CRITERIA FOR ANOTHER MENTAL DISORDER OR PREEXISTING MENTAL DISORDER
D. SYMPTOMS DO NOT REPRESENT . . .
E. DURATION OR PERSISTANCE OF SYMPTOMS OVER A SPECIFIC TIME FRAME

Additionally, both the ICD-10 and F Codes should be listed as well. In time these may change, but for now include them on the ICA p.1 for familiarity.

REMEMBER

The DSM-V has other more specific identifying criteria that are more accurate, many of which are in the “V” code area. Please do not get in the habit of seeing your client’s presenting problem as just an adjustment disorder. Watch ONSET, CLINICAL SIGNIFICANCE, DOES IT MEET OTHER MH DISORDER CRITERIA, DO SYMPTOMS REPRESENT OR DO NOT REPRESENT AN IDENTIFIED OTHER CONDITION, DURATION.