WHAT IS SIMPLE IN SIMPLE SCHIZOPHRENIA?

Sir,

It is often queried how a type of schizophrenia which has been known to progress relentlessly to deterioration and often poorly responsive to treatment be called a 'simple' schizophrenia. Though psychiatry literature has not raised the issue, discussions at seminars and clinical fora have tended to call such a terminology a misnomer for such a 'complicated' picture, forgetting the fact that the same person who gave us the term schizophenias also coined the 'simple' term. Search into psychiatric literature failed to give the reason for Bleuler's choice of this term, but the answer is found in the English dictionary (Concise Oxford Dictionary; Allen, 1990). Several editions of the dictionary defined the word 'simple' variously, some of which seemed to solve this simple issue.

1. Simple is defined as "not complicated, elaborate, adorned, highly developed and unsophisticated, foolish, artless, ignorant" and a simple life meaning an attempt to return to more primitive conditions. In simple schizophrenia, the clinical picture is 'unadorned' with obviously psychotic features like delusions, hallucinations, gross psychomotor disorder or florid thought disorder. The vagrant and withdrawn behavior, self-neglect and the negative picture suggest a return to a more 'primitive' existence.

2. Simple as meaning to be insignificant, of low rank and trifling in nature indicate the non-productive life, social marginalisation of simple schizophrenia patients and the self-absorbed, idle and aimless life of such patients. Preoccupation with and wasting away time and energy on trifles is seen in such patients.

This semantic understanding of the term 'simple' is probably the reason Eugen Bleuler used it to call a syndrome which appears 'complicated' to our 'simple' minds.

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REFERENCE

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