

'Asperger's disorder' being dropped from psychiatrists' diagnostic guide

By Lindsey Tanner, The Associated Press

CHICAGO -- The now familiar term "Asperger's disorder" is being dropped. And abnormally bad and frequent temper tantrums will be given a scientific-sounding diagnosis called DMDD. But "dyslexia" and other learning disorders remain.

The revisions come in the first major rewrite in nearly 20 years of the diagnostic guide used by the nation's psychiatrists. Changes were approved Saturday.

Full details of all the revisions will come next May when the American Psychiatric Association's new diagnostic manual is published, but the impact will be huge, affecting millions of children and adults worldwide. The manual also is important for the insurance industry in deciding what treatment to pay for, and it helps schools decide how to allot special education.

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This diagnostic guide "defines what constellations of symptoms" doctors recognize as mental disorders, said Dr. Mark Olfson, a Columbia University psychiatry professor. More important, he said, it "shapes who will receive what treatment. Even seemingly subtle changes to the criteria can have substantial effects on patterns of care."

Olfson was not involved in the revision process. The changes were approved Saturday in suburban Washington, D.C., by the psychiatric association's board of trustees.

The aim is not to expand the number of people diagnosed with mental illness, but to ensure that affected children and adults are more accurately diagnosed so they can get the most appropriate treatment, said Dr. David Kupfer. He chaired the task force in charge of revising the manual and is a psychiatry professor at the University of Pittsburgh.

One of the most hotly argued changes was how to define the various ranges of autism. Some advocates opposed the idea of dropping the specific diagnosis for Asperger's disorder. People with that disorder often have high intelligence and vast knowledge on narrow subjects but lack social skills. Some who have the condition embrace their quirkiness and vow to continue to use the label.

And some Asperger's families opposed any change, fearing their kids would lose a diagnosis and no longer be eligible for special services.

But the revision will not affect their education services, experts say.

The new manual adds the term "autism spectrum disorder," which already is used by many experts in the field. Asperger's disorder will be dropped and incorporated under that umbrella diagnosis. The