

ANXIETY DISORDERS

Composite Diagnostic Evaluation

Thomas A. Ban, M.D.

From Neurobiology to Nosology

Recognition that neurobiologic measures cannot substitute for psychopathologic symptoms as building blocks of mental illness and that cross-sectional manifestations alone do not suffice for the identification of valid nosologic categories of disease, led to the gradual replacement of the traditional symptom-oriented cross-sectional psychopharmacologic approach with a disease-oriented psychopathologic approach in the detection and classification of mental illness. Within this disease-oriented psychopathologic approach, it is in terms of its dynamic totality, i.e., sudden vs insidious onset, episodic vs continuous course and recovery vs defect at the outcome, that each mental illness is defined, and it is in terms of its specific structure, created by the adding of each single pathologic and/or abnormal form of experience, that mental illness is perceived (Figure 1). It was within this disease-oriented approach that panic disorder, a disorder with acute onset and episodic course, was separated from generalized anxiety disorder, a disorder with insidious onset and chronic continuous course.

