

# Introduction to health illness and the sick role

Society and Health, Foundations of Clinical Practice

Helen Ward, 26 October 2011

Professor of Public Health,  
Consultant in Public Health and Genitourinary Medicine  
Imperial College  
[h.ward@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:h.ward@imperial.ac.uk)

# Learning outcomes

- To be able to explain the difference between biological, psychological and social perspectives on ill health
- To define health, disease, illness and the sick role
- To appreciate the role of diagnoses on doctors, patients and carers

# Practical medicine course, final year: case report

- A 65 year old man consults his GP with chest pain
- What is the objective of the diagnostic process?

# “The cramming for finals approach” : list the causes of chest pain

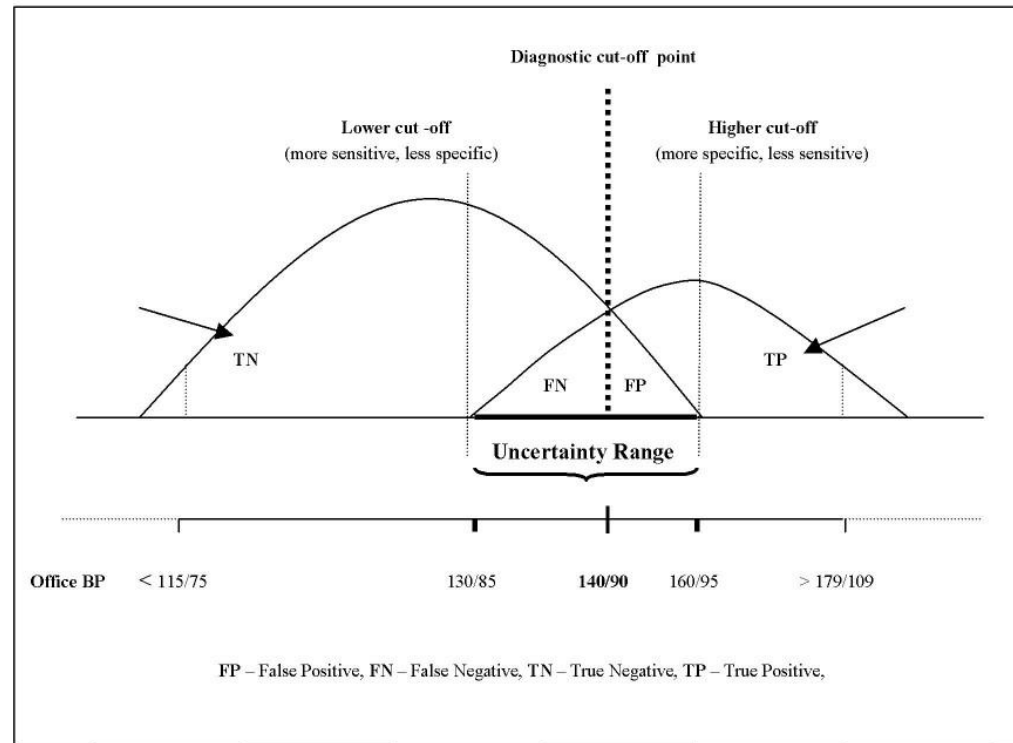
- Myocardial ischaemia, MI or angina
- Reflux oesophagitis, oesophageal spasm
- Pulmonary embolism
- Hyperventilation
- Spontaneous pneumothorax
- Aortic Dissection
- Pericarditis
- Pleuritis
- Costochondral pain
- Early herpes zoster
- Ectopic beats
- Peptic ulcer, cholecystitis, pancreatitis
- Depression
- Alcohol-related
- .....

# Objective of diagnostic process

- Pain caused by myocardial ischaemia in impending infarction must be differentiated from non-ischaemic chest pain
- Non-ischaemic pain may be caused by other severe conditions that require acute treatment; such as pericarditis, aortic dissection and pulmonary embolism
- The objective is to make a diagnosis and inform management

# Aim is to diagnose “disease”

- “disease” is a medically defined pathology, an abnormal condition
  - Assumes that there is a normal and abnormal state,
  - Example of hypertension
  - Often blurred boundaries, continuum



# Doctors and disease

- Biomedical model
- Identify abnormality and label disease
- Treatment aims to cure
- Regard body as a machine
- Specialization suggests a series of parts

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"The human body is a very intricate piece of machinery, Mr. Whitney, and I'm afraid you're just not mechanically inclined."

# What is the aim of the diagnostic process for patients?

- Discuss in small groups
- Are there any differences with the aim of a doctor?
- Come up with examples



# A diagnosis of autism

- [http://www.healthtalkonline.org/Autism/Life\\_ontheAutismspectrum\\_Parents/Topic/3887/](http://www.healthtalkonline.org/Autism/Life_ontheAutismspectrum_Parents/Topic/3887/)
- Paula
- Alison and Tony
- Dot

# Meaning for patients

- Relief or fear
- Validation
- Recognition

# The sick role (Parsons, 1951)

Functionalist perspective - Illness as *deviance*

- The sick role identifies two rights:
  - the exemption from normal social roles
  - removed from responsibility for their own state
- and two obligations:
  - to want to get well speedily
  - to consult expert medical opinion

# Perspectives

- Disease (=“biological”)
  - categories or concepts with which doctors attempt to understand and control illness
- Illness (=“psychological”)
  - the subjective state involving the experience of symptoms
- Sickness (=“social”)
  - a social state involving the rights and obligations governing other people’s response to someone who is unwell