

# **XII National Congress of the Research Group in Psychosomatics (RGP) October 21 and 22, 2022**

## **THE CLINIMETRIC METHOD**

### ***Foreword***

This Supplement of *La Clinica Terapeutica* includes abstracts of lectures, symposia, workshops, clinical case presentations and posters of the XII National Congress of the Research Group in Psychosomatics (RGP).

The Congress is characterized by “The clinimetric method”. It is a tribute to Alvan Feinstein who 40 years ago introduced clinimetrics as a discipline aimed at creating indices, rating scales and other expressions to describe or measure symptoms, physical signs and other clinical phenomena. The standard taxonomy, in fact, did not include, and still does not include, the patterns of symptoms, the severity of the disease, the effects of comorbid manifestations, the timing of the phenomena, the rate of disease progression, functional capacity and other clinical characteristics which demarcate the main prognostic and therapeutic differences between patients who otherwise would appear deceptively similar because they share the same diagnosis and laboratory results. Feinstein also added the psychosocial impact of the disease and treatment on individual, family and interpersonal relationships, including physical activity, the joys and pains of everyday life.

Psychosomatics represents an extraordinary opportunity to improve clinical practice in medicine, psychiatry and clinical psychology by integrating biological, psychological and social factors. The bio-psycho-social model is still the theoretical and practical core of psychosomatics. It allows clinicians to see disease as the result of mechanisms of interaction at the cellular, interpersonal and environmental levels that include personality and familiarity. The congress organized by the RGP for 2022 highlights clinimetrics as a science at the service of psychosomatics capable of providing the clinical tools that allow a complete and accurate assessment according to the principles of the bio-psycho-social model. The abstracts describe innovative studies and reflections on the most current and hot topics of psychosomatics. The crucial role of clinimetrics, and of the specific type of assessment it makes possible in psychosomatics, are underlined in research and by the importance of proposing integrated treatments. An increasing number of studies suggest that the clinical process leading to diagnosis should be based on a comprehensive and accurate assessment based on clinically useful indices. Such indices are expected to be, among the others, sensitive in recording changes over time, capable of providing additional information according to the principle of incremental validity, able to investigate the person in the complexity linked to suffering and resources. This approach can be an antidote to the reductionist models that clash with clinical reality and that make the patient’s visit a kind of distracted listening and subsequent random prescription. Clinimetrics and psychosomatic assessment thus become essential in clinical practice and research. The abstracts document how psychosomatics in clinical practice is more timing than ever and adequate for give a home to researchers and clinicians who want to venture off the beaten and clinically unsatisfactory paths of standard nosography.

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# Personality, defence mechanisms and psychological distress in women with fibromyalgia.

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**Background:** Several studies show that many personality traits are associated with fibromyalgia (FM), a chronic pain syndrome, worsening both the quality of life and psychological distress of patients. Considering the few studies have examined the defence mechanisms used by FM patients, the main aim of our study was to investigate the personality traits and defence mechanisms in a sample of FM patients and compare them to a pain-free healthy control group (HC). In addition, we investigated the effect of personality traits and defence mechanisms on psychological distress (anxiety and depressive symptoms) in FM patients.

**Methods:** Fifty-four women with FM and fifty-four chronic-pain free women were asked to fill in the following measures: (1) Temperament and Character Inventory–Revised; (2) Toronto Alexithymia Scale; (3) Defense Style Questionnaire and (4) Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale.

**Results:** The results indicated that FM patients display higher alexithymia ( $p < .001$ ), higher harm avoidance ( $p < .001$ ), lower self-directedness ( $p < .003$ ), lower persistence ( $p < .001$ ), higher use of maladaptive defence style ( $p < .001$ ) and higher levels of anxiety/depressive symptoms ( $p < .001$ ), compared to HC. Moreover, we found that in the final model, [ $F(1, 47) = 9.222, p = .004$ ] alexithymia ( $p = .004$ ), harm avoidance ( $p = .014$ ) and maladaptive defence style ( $p = .015$ ) were significant predictors of psychological distress in FM patients.

**Conclusion:** The present study is the first to explore the contribution of both defence mechanisms and personality characteristics on psychological distress among FM patients. Our findings have important clinical implications and may help diagnose and treat FM patients better.

## Psychological and psychosomatic components in fibromyalgia syndrome.

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**Background:** Fibromyalgia (FM) is defined as a complex syndrome characterized by chronic musculoskeletal pain and heterogeneous symptomatology, including psychological and psychosomatic manifestations. Although the etiology and development of FM are still unclear, the development and maintenance of the syndrome may be due to a variety of factors. The aim of this study was to evaluate the prevalence of psychological symptoms in a group of patients with fibromyalgia (FM) compared with patients with rheumatoid arthritis (RA), and to investigate their association with clinical and psychological variables.

**Methods:** One hundred patients with FM and one hundred patients with RA were compared with a group of healthy participants (N = 100). Anxiety-depressive symptoms, alexithymia, psychosomatic syndromes, and quality of life (HRQoL) were assessed.

**Results:** FM patients reported significantly higher levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms, more psychosomatic syndromes, and lower HRQoL compared with RA patients and HC. Regarding alexithymia, FM patients showed greater difficulties compared to HC, but not compared to RA patients.

**Conclusion:** The present study revealed a higher prevalence of psychological symptoms in fibromyalgia patients compared with rheumatoid arthritis patients and healthy controls. A better knowledge and understanding of these underlying mechanisms of the syndrome could allow clinicians to structure more specific and tailored interventions, taking more into account the psychological dimension of the disease.