

## **With DSM-5 on the Way, Is It Time to Update Definition of “Mental Disability”?**

By [Daniel Schwartz](#) on February 21st, 2012

In May 2013, a fifth version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders is expected to be published. It is widely anticipated in the mental health field.

What is the DSM-5 all about? DSM is published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) and contains descriptions, symptoms, and other criteria for diagnosing mental disorders. These criteria for diagnosis provide a common language among clinicians – professionals who treat patients with mental disorders.

And if Connecticut isn't careful, its publication could mean that proposed mental disorders under the DSM-5, such as Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder, could become protected.

How can that be? Well, Connecticut — unlike the federal ADA which lumps mental and physical disabilities together — specifically protects employees with a “mental disability”. How is a “mental disability” defined? It “refers to an individual who has a record of, or is regarded as having one or more mental disorders, as defined in the most recent edition of the American Psychiatric Association’s “Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.”

And that's the issue. The DSM-5 (and its current version of DSM-IV) will be very broad. (It will also be dropping the Roman Numerals, but that's a post for another day.)

Why is it broad? Because the DSM-5 will be a diagnostic tool for mental disorders and as with all diagnostic tools, it is designed to find answers to different types of symptoms or conditions. This new version will expand the notion of a mental disorder to new limits.

As a legal tool, the new version will be a lousy device. Already, it is overbroad for legal purposes and the proposed version will include things that the legislature probably doesn't want to protect (such as Early Ejaculation).

So what can be done about this? The legislature ought to use the new version of the DSM as an opportunity to revisit the definitions of both physical and mental disabilities. The ADA has been revised recently to modernize the definition. It's time Connecticut considered doing the same.

Otherwise, the employee with a Hoarding Disorder could soon be in a protected class of his or her own.

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