



**THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND COLLEGE OF
PSYCHIATRISTS**

MODIFIED ESSAY QUESTIONS

(from the Auckland New Zealand program)

2013

PAPER I

STIMULUS

To be used as a handout while answering questions.

**This Stimulus must be collected by the invigilator at the end of
the examination.**

MODIFIED ESSAY QUESTION 1

Modified Essay Question 1: (23 marks)

Tom is a 20 year old unemployed youth living with his parents, who has no known past psychiatric history. His parents have become concerned about his behaviour during the past year, and brought him to his G.P. who referred him to you for assessment.

They describe Tom as behaving strangely, spending long periods in his room and often up wandering about the house during the night. At times they hear him talking aloud and arguing when he is by himself. He has become extremely suspicious of their neighbours and they have caught him checking the neighbour's mailbox and leafing through their mail. He seems to believe that he has won a competition but the neighbours have stolen the letter stating that he has won. He showed his mother a flyer from the local supermarket on which he had scribbled odd nonsensical symbols, as proof of this belief. Yesterday he threw a stone over the fence and broke their neighbours' glasshouse.

He last worked at a chocolate factory a year ago but had to leave there after an argument with his boss, who he claimed was harassing him. He has been unable to manage job interviews or to find work since, but does spend periods of time away from the house with various friends. His eating is erratic but he has not lost weight.

Question 1.1 (8 marks)

In your initial interview with Tom and his parents, what are the main things to determine, to further evaluate the degree of risk he poses to the neighbours or anyone else, including himself?

Question 1.2 (8 marks)

List up to four differential diagnoses for Tom in order of probability, with your rationale for these, and discuss how you would further investigate differentials to clarify the diagnosis.

You make a plan with Tom and his parents, to start oral antipsychotic medication. Later that day, Tom's mother calls you to say that she also wants to take him to see a naturopath for a consultation as she feels no option to help Tom should be overlooked.

Question 1.3 (4 marks)

How would you respond to this development?

Tom is commenced on risperidone medication, at a dose of 1 mg daily, increased to 2 mgs daily after 2 weeks. A week after the dose increase you are asked to review him as he is very restless. You determine that he has moderately severe akathisia. He is insistent that you provide some immediate relief from the symptoms.

Question 1.4 (3 marks)

How would you alter Tom's medication regime?

MODIFIED ESSAY QUESTION 2

Modified Essay Question 2: (27 marks)

Brian is a single 34 year old European sales executive living alone in an apartment, who presents with a seven year history of panic attacks. You carry out a full assessment. His first panic attacks occurred following a minor motor vehicle accident which happened while driving home from work. On that day he had been passed over for promotion for a job that he believed was rightfully his. Over the following years, the panic attacks have become increasingly frequent and are now occurring spontaneously. As a result, Brian has become increasingly reluctant to leave his house, and has had to cease work in the last six months. He has however been living off his investments and is not in financial difficulties. You establish a baseline for the frequency and severity of his symptoms - both the panic attacks and his avoidant behaviour. Brian denies any substance abuse and is physically well. He is currently between GPs, as his last GP retired and he has decided to change to a practice closer to his home.

Question 2.1 (10 marks)

Outline your short to medium-term management plan. Do not cover work rehabilitation.

Brian describes a fear of losing control when he panics and wants to know how to avoid this. It is apparent that more detailed information about panic attacks and agoraphobia and the treatment of these conditions will be helpful.

Question 2.2 (8 marks)

What are the essential points that you will cover in psychoeducation?

Brian responds well to psychoeducation and has been considering other treatment options while you were away on a month's leave. In the interim he has been making good progress, with a reduction in both the frequency and severity of his panic attacks and a lessening of avoidance behaviour. However, at your six week appointment with him, Brian admits that his brother Neil, a GP, has been prescribing lorazepam 1mg bd for him which he has been taking since first seeing you.

Question 2.3 (7 marks)

Discuss how you would approach this issue, including the information that you would provide to Brian.

You discuss trialling an SSRI medication for his panic disorder. Brian asks how long it will take before he might expect some benefits.

Question 2.4 (2 marks)

What is your reply?

MODIFIED ESSAY QUESTION 3

Modified Essay Question 3: (25 marks)

Alren, age seven, is referred to the local Community Child Mental Health service with behaviour problems. Alren is a refugee from a country at war and came here at age two with his mother and two older sisters. His father disappeared when Alren was one year old and is presumed dead.

The referral information describes Alren as aggressive to other children and uncooperative with ordinary routines. His verbal language is limited and he ignores other people much of the time. He likes to play by himself, usually with a set of toy cars.

Alren is well and has never had any serious illness. His birth was normal, but his mother was malnourished during pregnancy. He is on no medications. He has not been seen by mental health services before although the school has received extra staffing to help him settle into the classroom. His mother speaks reasonably good English and does not need an interpreter.

Question 3.1 (10 marks)

Outline the most important information you will gather in your first assessment appointment with Alren and his mother, to clarify Alren's diagnosis. Be specific about what you will need to find out.

Alren's mother asks you what she should do when he hits other family members.

Question 3.2 (8 marks)

Outline the advice and information you will give to Alren's mother.

Alren's teacher makes contact with you, and asks you to come to the school to discuss refugee families' mental health needs. You do some quick research and agree to talk to a small group of teachers at the school.

Question 3.3 (7 marks)

Describe the main points you would make at such a talk.

MODIFIED ESSAY QUESTION 4

Modified Essay Question 4: (25 marks)

Marion is a 27 year old social worker from the local Child Welfare office. She is known to mental health services and has a diagnosis of a borderline personality disorder, with two previous suicide attempts and some history of superficial lacerations to her forearms. She is however generally quite high functioning and sees a private psychotherapist in the community on a weekly basis.

Marion is estranged from her parents after a history of childhood sexual abuse by her father and her main support in the community is her partner Rosalie who is a teacher. Marion and Rosalie rent a house together. Marion's usual medication is fluoxetine 20mgs mane, quetiapine 200mgs and clonazepam 1 mg nocte, which is prescribed by her GP. She says that the quetiapine and clonazepam are for her chronic sleep problems.

Marion has been more stressed lately as one of the children under her care was badly beaten by his violent stepfather and a story criticising the Child Welfare service has been in the local newspaper. Marion was admitted two days ago to the psychiatric unit where you work, after a paracetamol overdose. She is under your care on the unit and is presently in the locked High Dependency Unit. Rosalie has visited her daily. Marion is now asking to transfer out onto the main ward, which is not locked.

Question 4.1 (2 marks)

Briefly explain how the ethical principle of non-maleficence applies, in making this decision.

You have read Marion's psychiatric records and have liaised with her GP about contacts with her, prescribing, and the GP's management recommendations.

Question 4.2 (9 marks)

What other information would you want to gather so as to make the decision about allowing Marion to leave the HDU, and from where would you obtain this information?

You find out that Marion has had some past crisis contacts with mental health services but there is no overall Management Plan in place for her.

Question 4.3 (9 marks)

Outline the main features that might be helpful in such a plan, and the process by which you would determine the details of the plan and set it in place.

Just before being discharged home, Marion asks to see you and says that she wants to read her psychiatric file.

Question 4.4 (5 marks)

Discuss your response to this request.

MODIFIED ESSAY QUESTION 5

Modified Essay Question 5: (20 marks)

Melanie, a 26 year old hairdresser, is recovering from a manic episode which has led to her being admitted for a three week period of compulsory treatment. She has a history of one prior hypomanic episode two years ago while on holiday in Fiji, which was followed by a major depression during which she took an overdose of sleeping tablets which required brief treatment at an Emergency Department. This depression was treated by her GP with fluoxetine 20 mgs for a period of four months.

She currently lives with her sister and brother in law after breaking up with her boyfriend of 1 year's standing when becoming manic and disinhibited prior to the recent admission.

While manic she spent \$1500 on clothes and worried her family by going to clubs late at night in a disinhibited state. She received two speeding tickets across this period.

She is currently treated with lithium carbonate 1000 mgs nocte (serum level stable at 0.8 umol/L), and olanzapine 10 mgs nocte. Her insight is now good, and she is euthymic and cooperative with treatment, and an informal patient. You have been managing her care as an inpatient and she is now being discharged to your care at a local clinic.

Question 5.1 (7 marks)

What will you recommend to Melanie regarding long-term prophylactic treatment with a mood stabiliser at this stage? Give details regarding your rationale and any evidence-base or criteria regarding your recommendations.

Melanie expresses concern to you that her medication may cause her to gain weight. It is clear that this could interfere with her adherence to treatment in the longer term.

Question 5.2 (7 marks)

How would you respond to her, and how would you manage this risk?

Two weeks after leaving hospital, Melanie appears flat in mood and more anxious. You are concerned that she may be becoming depressed again.

Question 5.3 (6 marks)

Discuss how you would respond to this development.

MODIFIED ESSAY QUESTION 6

Modified Essay Question 6: (20 marks)

You work in a mental health service for older people and have assessed Mrs Betty McKay, a 75 year old woman who has developed a major depression with melancholic and psychotic features, several months after her husband Bill's death from Alzheimer's disease. She has been admitted to a geriatric ward after having been found collapsed and hypothermic in her own home. She has recovered sufficiently to talk with you a little, but remains frail.

Her only relative Sarah, her daughter, lives in England and ward nursing staff tell you that Sarah has been contacted by phone and is very concerned about her mother but is unable to travel to be involved in her mother's care as one of her children has been hospitalised with severe asthma.

Mrs McKay is receiving intravenous fluids but is not eating or taking any oral medication. She declines all medication whenever this is discussed, telling you that she is "beyond all help" and "just a burden to everyone". She has a fixed belief that her brain is damaged "it's like Swiss cheese – full of holes".

A friend from her book club has visited her and is shocked by her deterioration. She says that Betty was always a cheerful, outgoing person, independent and sociable, up until the death of her husband.

Question 6.1 (4 marks)

Describe the indications for electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) to treat Mrs McKay.

Mrs McKay also expresses the fixed belief that she has Alzheimer's disease as she can no longer concentrate or remember anything, and says that she cannot bear to "go the same way as my Bill" and wants to be put out of her misery. A medical student tells you that she asked the student if she could have ECT "to end it all".

Question 6.2 (7 marks)

Discuss the ethical issues and related practical problems in the use of ECT to treat Mrs McKay. How would you attempt to overcome any such barriers to the use of ECT?

Mrs McKay's daughter Sarah raises concerns, saying she has heard that ECT can cause memory loss.

Question 6.3 (9 marks)

Discuss how you would respond to Sarah about this.
