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**Politics, science, and the emergence of a new disease. The case of chronic fatigue syndrome.**

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Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) emerged as a diagnostic category during the last decade. Initial research suggested that CFS was a relatively rare disorder with a high level of psychiatric comorbidity. Many physicians minimized the seriousness of this disorder and also interpreted the syndrome as being equivalent to a psychiatric disorder. These attitudes had negative consequences for the treatment of CFS. By the mid-1990s, findings from more representative epidemiological studies indicated considerably higher CFS prevalence rates. However, the use of the revised CFS case definition might have produced heterogeneous patient groups, possibly including some patients with pure psychiatric disorders. Social scientists have the expertise to more precisely define this syndrome and to develop appropriate and sensitive research strategies for understanding this disease.

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