

Attitudes Regarding Chronic Fatigue Syndrome: The Importance of a Name

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Undergraduates from diverse academic backgrounds and medical trainees were assessed regarding their attitudes about and familiarity with chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS). We explored whether different names given to chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS, myalgic encephalopathy, or Florence Nightingale disease) were associated with differences in attributions regarding its cause, nature, severity, contagion, prognosis, and treatment. Participants' attributions toward the illness varied with the names used to characterize it. Participants prompted with the myalgic encephalopathy name were more likely to attribute a biomedical cause to the illness, and less likely to consider patients as candidates for organ donation than those prompted with the CFS name. Although the medical trainees were less likely to consider the patient as malingering, and more likely to view the illness as leading to poorer quality of life and a poorer prognosis, they were also more likely to consider the illness a form of primary depression, more likely to think the patient would attempt suicide, and less likely to consider associated cognitive symptoms as severe. The implications are discussed.