

110 years of schizophrenia: From phenomenology to neurobiology

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To describe and possibly quantify symptoms is essential to diagnose and treat illnesses adequately, respectively mental illnesses. In his time, Emil Kraepelin began a research programme to quantify psychiatric disorders. As for psychoses, he subtyped these mainly based on their long-term outcome into the prototypes of “Dementia Praecox” and “Manic-Depressive Illness”.

Eugen Bleuler, and later Kurt Schneider, tried to subtype psychopathology in schizophrenia into symptoms central for the diagnosis (e.g., first-rank symptoms) and less central for the diagnosis (e.g., accessory symptoms by Bleuler). The potential underlying neurobiology had already been acknowledged back then despite less developed scientific conditions and research methods. Attempts to connect domain-specific psychopathology with abnormalities in neural subsystems replaced traditional symptoms. Our own research group follows this line of thought connecting the domains cognitive dysfunction with neural dysfunction, thus proposing a specific mechanism connected to a bundle of risk factors.