

# Psychiatry Grand Rounds

WCM Department of Psychiatry  
Psychology CE Announcement



**Weill Cornell  
Medicine**  
Psychiatry

## *A Psychodynamic Perspective on the Difficult Patient*

**Eric M. Plakun, MD**

Senior Consultant, Erikson Institute of the Austen Riggs Center

### **Location: Uris Auditorium AND Livestreamed via Zoom**

Wednesday, April 30th, 2025

11:00am – 12:00pm

<https://weillcornell.zoom.us/j/92812036154>

Meeting ID: 928 1203 6154

Password: 12345



1 CE credit available to WCM Department of Psychiatry full time and voluntary faculty Psychologists, Social Workers and LMHCs, who sign in with their full name, attend the entire lecture and complete a survey which will be emailed following the completion of the lecture. Note you can join no later than 10 minutes after the start of time and must stay for the entire duration of the event for CE eligibility. The CE survey must be completed within 30 days of the lecture. Please contact [wcmpsychiatryce@med.cornell.edu](mailto:wcmpsychiatryce@med.cornell.edu) for additional CE information

### ***Speaker***

Eric M. Plakun, M.D., is senior consultant to the Erikson Institute of the Austen Riggs Center. He is past medical director/CEO of the Austen Riggs Center and past clinical faculty of Harvard Medical School. He has published and lectured around the nation and overseas. Dr. Plakun served as plaintiffs' expert in the landmark case of Wit v. United Behavioral Health that established pursuit of recovery rather than crisis stabilization as the goal of treatment for mental and substance use disorders. He is a Distinguished Life Fellow of the APA, past member of its Board of Trustees, and founder of its Psychotherapy Caucus. A leader in organized psychiatry and psychoanalysis, he has been honored by the American Psychoanalytic Association for championing psychoanalytic work in psychiatry and by the Massachusetts Psychiatric Society as the Outstanding Psychiatrist in Clinical Psychiatry.

Financial Disclosure: Dr. Plakun has no relevant financial relationship(s) with ineligible companies to disclose and DOES NOT INTEND to discuss off-label or investigational use of products or services.

### ***Abstract***

Some wonder whether psychoanalysis and a psychodynamic perspective remain relevant in psychiatry. This presentation argues that the answer is a resounding “Yes,” especially when dealing with patients we come to experience as “difficult” and/or as not responding to treatment. The presentation reviews competition between biomedical and biopsychosocial models of psychiatry, suggesting that evidence from neuroscience and genomic research better supports core assumptions of a biopsychosocial rather than a biomedical model. The presentation demonstrates how failure to attend adequately to biopsychosocial and psychodynamic issues contributes to the experience of patients as “difficult” and to the phenomenon of treatment resistance, especially in patients with significant childhood adversity and personality disorders. It then uses jargon-free language to review and illuminate concepts from psychoanalysis that are relevant to biopsychosocial, psychodynamic general psychiatric practice, especially for those patients we experience as “difficult” or presenting with treatment resistant disorders. It explains the concept of enactment in ordinary language, including how to detect, analyze, and make use of enactments in clinical work, and addresses how selection of the most appropriate level of care can improve outcomes.

### ***Learning Objectives***

1. Apply strategies to improve clinical outcomes when working with patients who are experienced as “difficult.”
2. Describe evidence supporting the use of a biopsychosocial model over a purely biomedical model in psychiatric practice.
3. Define the concept of enactment and demonstrate how it can be utilized in clinical work with challenging patients.

### ***References***

1. Plakun, E. M. (2018). Psychodynamic psychiatry, the biopsychosocial model, and the Difficult Patient. *Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 41(2), 237–248. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psc.2018.01.007>
2. Plakun, E. M. (2023). Psychodynamic Therapy: An Overview for trainees and their teachers: Part 1–The Basics. *Journal of Psychiatric Practice*, 29(2), 142–146. <https://doi.org/10.1097/prs.0000000000000702>
3. Plakun, E. (2011). Treatment resistance and patient authority: The Austen Riggs Reader. National Geographic Books.

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