

Contract on My Life

Mr. Polsen, a 42-year-old married African American postal worker and father of two is brought to the emergency room by his wife because he has been insisting that “there is a contract out on my life.”

According to Mr. Polsen, his problems began 4 months ago when his supervisor at work accused him of tampering with a package. Mr. Polsen denied that this was true and, because his job was in jeopardy, filed a protest. At a formal hearing, he was exonerated and, according to him, “This made my boss furious. He felt he had been publicly humiliated.”

About two weeks later, Mr. Polsen noticed that his co-workers were avoiding him. “When I’d walk toward them, they’d just turn away like they didn’t want to see me.” Shortly thereafter, he began to feel that they were talking about him at work. He never could make out clearly what they were saying, but he gradually became convinced that they were avoiding him because his boss had taken out a contract on his life.

This state of affairs was stable for about 2 months, until Mr. Polsen began noticing several ‘large white cars’ new to his neighborhood, driving up and down the street on which he lived. He became increasingly frightened and was convinced that the “hit men” were in these cars. He refused to go out of his apartment without an escort. Several times when he saw the white cars, he would panic and run home. After one such incident, his wife finally insisted that he accompany her to the emergency room.

Mr. Polsen was described by his wife and brother as a basically well-adjusted, outgoing man who enjoyed being with his family. He had served with distinction in Vietnam. He was little combat there, but was pulled from a burning truck by a buddy seconds before the truck blew up.

When interviewed, Mr. Polsen was obviously frightened. Aside from his belief that he was in danger of being killed, his speech, behavior and demeanor were in no way odd or strange. His predominant mood was anxious. He denied having hallucinations and all other psychotic symptoms except those noted above. He claimed not to be depressed and, although he noted that he had recently had some difficulty falling asleep, he said there had been no change in his appetite, sex drive, energy level or concentration.

Discussion of “Contract on My Life”

Mr. Polsen’s anxiety stems from his belief that his boss has taken a contract out on his life. There is no reason to believe this; thus, we must conclude that he has a delusion. Because contract killers are sometimes hired in real life, the delusion is non-bizarre. Mr. Polsen has no auditory or visual hallucinations, no manic or depressive syndrome, and no evidence of a general medical condition or the use of a substance that might have caused the disturbance. His behavior, apart from the delusion and its ramifications, is not odd or bizarre. These are the characteristics of Delusional Disorder. Because the content of his delusion involves the theme of being malevolently treated in some way, the disorder is specified as Persecutory Type.

People with the Persecutory Type of Delusional Disorder are often reluctant to seek help. Mr. Polsen, however, was frightened enough to allow his wife to take him to the emergency room.

Follow Up

Mr. Polsen was hospitalized. During the first week of hospitalization, he received an antipsychotic drug. He remained delusional, however, and in fact became convinced that several of the other patients on the ward with Italian names were part of the “hit team” sent to kill him. Over the ensuing three weeks, with continued treatment, these beliefs faded. At discharge, 1 month after admission, he stated: “ I guess my boss has called off the contract. He couldn’t get away with it now without publicity.”

Mr. Polsen was followed up over a period of 18 months, during which time he had two relapses into more active delusions, all with the same content, and each occurring after he stopped taking his medication. Both episodes resolved relatively rapidly with outpatient treatment with an antipsychotic drug.



John Nash: (A Beautiful Mind)

Real-life mathematician, John Nash (Russell Crowe) was branded at an early age as a genius. After winning a prestigious scholarship to Princeton University, he develops his ultimate theory "Governing Dynamics." This earns him a professorship/research position at MIT. There he meets his future wife, Alicia (Jennifer Connelly) who is not only both bright and beautiful, but who loves him deeply. Meanwhile, he is called upon to serve his country in a secret mission, but the task takes an emotional toll on him. Nash is a paranoid schizophrenic. His college roommate (Paul Bettany), his roommate's niece, and the Defense Department agent (Ed Harris) were all imagined. Nash is hospitalized, and undergoes intense experimental treatment with mixed results. In his later years, he's able to control his illness and goes on to win a Nobel Prize for his economic theories.

