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Comment: Psychiatric Statistics and Clinical Information

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The role of statistics in psychiatry is broad and emerging, attributes also applicable to psychiatry itself, a clinical science with biological and psychosocial underpinnings. It may be helpful to give attention to historical perspectives and informational complexity in order to understand the current role of statistics in psychiatry as well as to be prepared to appraise its future directions.

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Early endeavors to use quantitative methods in clinical and epidemiological psychiatry are best illustrated by the pioneering works of Philippe Pinel, Jean Etienne Esquirol, and J. B. M. Parchappe in the late seventeenth century and first half of the eighteenth century. Their guiding principles were careful observations of clinical events and a critical and quantitative investigative approach. These French pathfinders are responsible for what is probably the earliest documented use of statistics in psychopathology and psychiatric care. Of particular interest here is Parchappe (1839) who, in his *Recherches Statistiques sur les Causes de l'Aliénation Mentale*, not only presented frequency analyses of patients and patient-related events, but also ascertained relationships between complex domains, i.e., physical and moral causes and