

Recovering From Psychosis

Sometimes people with psychotic symptoms are reluctant to seek treatment. Perhaps they believe there is nothing wrong, or hope the symptoms will go away without help. They may be concerned about the actual treatment or worried about what people may think.

An increased understanding of psychosis has led to new drugs and therapies being developed. People with psychosis are likely to be treated at home, usually visiting a local mental health clinic on a regular basis. Home visits by local mental health services can be arranged and if hospitalisation is required, this is usually only for a brief period.

Psychosis, like other illnesses, can be treated. Most people make a good recovery.

What Will Treatment Involve?

The first phase of treatment involves assessment. This means having a series of interviews with a mental health specialist, such as a psychiatrist, clinical psychologist or community psychiatric nurse. The specialist will spend time getting to know the person, as well as speaking with family and friends. Blood tests and x-rays will probably be organised to exclude a physical cause for the symptoms. This is a frightening and confusing time for everyone concerned and a great deal of reassurance and tolerance is needed. It is important to establish a good trusting relationship wherever possible.

Information obtained from the person with the psychosis and their family and friends, together with the test results, will provide some idea about the type of psychosis being experienced, the cause, and how the person can best be helped.

Sometimes psychotic symptoms go away rapidly and people resume a normal life immediately. Other people take several weeks or even months to recover. Like after any illness, they may want to spend some time convalescing or they may wish to use a variety of different treatment options. Determining the best treatment will depend on factors such as personal preference, how severe the psychotic symptoms are, how long they have been present, and what the apparent cause is.

Medication

Medication can be a crucial treatment for psychosis. Along with other forms of treatment, it plays a fundamental role in recovery from a psychotic episode and in prevention of further episodes. There are a number of different types of medication which are very effective in reducing the symptoms

of psychosis and the anxiety and distress these symptoms can cause. Treatment commences with a low dose of medication and details about how much to take and when to take it will be worked out with a doctor. Medication will be monitored and if side-effects develop the type of medication or the amount taken may be changed. This is critical in order to avoid distressing side effects which can lead to a person being unwilling to accept medication which is central to their recovery.

Counselling and Psychological Therapy

Having someone to talk to is an important part of treatment. The exact method may vary to suit the individual and the phase of the psychotic episode. A person with acute psychotic symptoms may simply want to know there is someone who can understand their experience and provide reassurance that they will recover. As the recovery phase progresses, people may ask 'why me?' and learn practical ways to prevent further episodes, such as stress management and early recognition of warning signs.

Counselling or therapy can take place on an individual basis or in groups.

Practical Assistance

Treatment can also involve assistance with day-to-day things, such as getting back to school or work, arranging accommodation or obtaining finances.

When Should Hospital Be Considered?

Most people with psychosis can be supported at home by relatives or friends as long as they are provided with skilled and regular support from mental health professionals. First episode patients should be treated at home, if possible, to minimise distress and disruption to the young person.

Home-based care can be provided by your local community mental health service. Crisis Assessment and Treatment (CAT) services, who provide intensive 24-hour support to the person and their family, are often a part of community mental health services.

Sometimes, however, there are benefits in spending a period of time in hospital before continuing with home treatment. Hospitalisation allows symptoms to be observed more fully, assists investigations and helps with the start of treatment. Sometimes people request hospitalisation so they can rest and feel safe.

Today, hospitalisation is more commonly reserved for situations where psychotic symptoms are placing the person or other people at risk. For example, the person may be seriously considering suicide. In such cases, hospitalisation allows assessment and treatment to be continued and ensures that the person is safe.

In some cases, admission may need to be arranged against the person's will or on an involuntary basis, at least at the beginning. However, treatment at home is resumed as soon as possible.

How Can the Person Be Involved?

People with early psychosis are encouraged to be actively involved in their own treatment. There is a need to learn about psychosis, about the recovery process, and what the individual can do to promote and maintain recovery. Sometimes there are secondary problems to be dealt with, like how to catch up with missed school or work, or how to cope with feelings of depression and stress related to the experience. It is important for the person to know their rights and to ask questions when something is not clear.

What About Recovery?

The pattern of recovery from psychosis varies from person to person. Some people recover quickly with very little intervention. Others may benefit from support over a longer period.

Recovery from the first episode usually takes a number of months. If symptoms remain or return, the recovery process may be prolonged. Some people experience a difficult period lasting months or even years before things really settle down. The important thing to remember is that psychosis is treatable.

Most people recover from Psychosis to lead satisfying and productive lives.

Further Information

Other information sheets are:

- ***What is Psychosis? - Information Sheet No 1***
- ***Getting Help Early - Information Sheet No 3***
- ***How Can I Help Someone With Psychosis? - Information Sheet No 4***

and are available from:

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