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Dorset HealthCare 
NHS Trust

Recovering from Psychosis

Recovering form 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 will 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 Community Mental Health Team (CMHT) on a regular basis. Home visits by local mental health team members can be arranged. 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 mental health professionals, such as a psychiatrist or community mental health nurse (CMHN). they will spend time getting to know the person, as well as speaking to the family and friends. Blood tests and x-rays will probably be organised to exclude a physical cause for the symptoms. However there is no test to identify psychosis. 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 psychosis and their family and friends, together with the

we have got help earlier? You will have mixed emotions and reactions during this time. Any feelings you have are appropriate.

4. As the patient begins to recover and starts to show signs of being well, you may experience great relief and pleasure. You may also have started to understand the illness more by this time and start to feel more hopeful about the future.

5. As recovery progresses you may find your anxiety, questions or worries start to increase again as your family member, partner or friend starts to reintegrate back into the family and community. Often family members find themselves watching for signs for of relapse or strange behaviour. You may feel over-protective and anxious, wanting the patient to be well as quickly as possible and not do anything that may cause relapse. It can be difficult balancing the needs for independence and care.

6. As recovery continues, there is a gradual adjustment by everyone concerned. You feel reassured that recovery is occurring and some normality returns to your life. You speak with the patient about psychosis, what it was like for everyone and how to help each other in the future.

Remember that families and friends also need a period of recovery and time to understand and accept what has happened. Don't keep things secret – talking with others, whether it be with family members, friends or professional, can be helpful.

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 illness, they may want to spend time convalescing. 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 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. 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

Being able to talk to someone is an important part of treatment. Commonly referred to as talking therapies these are specific psychological approaches. The exact method may vary to suit the individual and the phase of the psychotic episode. A person may simply want to know there is someone who can understand their experiences and provide reassurance that they will recover. Education is an important part of recovery to enable a person to understand they've experienced psychosis, answering worrying questions, learning practical ways to prevent further episodes, such as stress management and relapse prevention. The person and their Care Coordinator (CCO) will work out the most suitable approach.

Treatment can also involve assistance with day-to-day things, such as getting back to school or work, arranging accommodation or obtaining finances. Sometimes there are secondary problems to be dealt with, like how to catch up on missed school or work, or how to cope with feelings of depression and stress related to the experience.

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. Where possible the individual should be treated at home to minimise distress and disruption.

Sometimes, however, there are benefits in spending a period

How can I Help Recovery?

Family, partners and friends are important in the process of recovery. When a person is recovering from their psychotic episode you can provide love, stability, understanding and reassurance, as well as help with practical issues.

However, you may need your own period of recovery and adjustment to all that has happened.

It can be useful to understand some of the stages you may have gone through.

Common stages

It is quite common for families and friends to go through the following stages:

1. Initially you may be in crisis as you become aware that something serious is happening and your family member or friend is unwell. You may feel very anxious, worried and frightened at this time.
2. As it becomes clear that something is not quite right you start to seek help. This is also a time where you may be adjusting to the fact that your family member or friend is unwell and the situation cannot be left to clear up by itself.
3. As you find help you will probably have lots of questions and worries – What is happening? What is psychosis? What causes it? Will this happen again? How is it treated? What can we do to help? What will we tell other people? Will our family member or friend understand why help was needed? Should

Guidelines for Families

- **Be yourself**
- **Gain information and understand that the person may be behaving and talking differently due to the psychotic symptoms**
- **Understand that psychotic symptoms are stressful for everyone and that you may have a range of feelings – shock, fear, sadness, anger, frustration, despair.**
- **Talking with other people will help you to deal with these feelings. Believe a person will recover – even if it takes time. Be patient.**
- **When a person is in an acute stage they may seem child-like. Sometimes they need to be in a safe, comforting environment and sometimes they need others to help with decisions.**
- **Try not to take it personally if a person says hurtful words to you when they are unwell.**
- **When a person has acute psychotic symptoms they may be fixed in their beliefs and ideas. Don't get involved in long disagreements, but listen with interest to gain an understanding of their current reality to show sympathy and for future reference, to discuss when they are better.**
- **Take care of yourself. It is a balance between care and concern and not getting too run down yourself.**

of time in hospital before returning home and receiving community support. Hospitalization allows symptoms to be observed and assessed and helps with the start or type of treatment. Sometimes people request hospitalization so they can rest and feel safe.

Today hospitalization 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, hospitalization 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. This is where a person is admitted involuntarily, using the Mental Health Act 1983. Where the Mental Health Act is used the person's care is reviewed regularly and it's continuation depends on the risks to themselves and others. When it is appropriate, treatment at home is resumed as soon as possible.

How can the Person be involved?

People with psychosis are encouraged to be actively involved in their own treatment, to be able to learn about psychosis, and it's recovery process, and what can be done to promote and maintain recovery, can be helpful to the individual and their family. 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 long period.

Recovery from the first episode can sometimes take 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.

How can I help someone with psychosis?

Families and partners or friends find it hard to make the decision to obtain help for lots of reasons. The person experiencing a psychotic episode may not wish to get help or even acknowledge that they are unwell. It can be extremely hard to cope alone with a person who is in psychotic state.

Help is needed for families, partners and friends so they can understand what is happening and find out how to be involved in the assessment, treatment and recovery. This help can be obtained from your GP and the Community Mental Health Team (CMHT). They will tell you what to do next and where treatment can be obtained. Initially your biggest concern will be understanding what is happening and getting the right sort of help.

How can I help during treatment?

Once you have found a professional or service experienced in dealing with psychosis you may find it useful to:

- Try to think of yourself and the professional as having the same goal – to help the person with psychosis and work towards recovery. It is like a partnership between yourself and the treating person or team.
- Find out who else is in the treatment team – ask for their names and contact numbers. Ask staff specifically what their role is now and what it will be in the future. Ask who is the best person to contact and make a note of all this information. A good place to store this could be in the Carers Handbook available from the CMHT's or wards in the hospital.
- Ask to attend Care Programme Approach (CPA) reviews and prepare a list of questions to take with you. Feel free to ask questions and express your current worries and concerns. If you don't understand what you are being told, say so and ask for a clearer explanation.

How should I relate to the person who is ill?

If you are with a person when they are psychotic and behaving strangely, you may feel frightened or frustrated. It is important to remember that they are still your son, daughter, sister, wife, husband, partner or friend. It is difficult for a person who is ill to be how they usually are.

Often families and friends ask how they should behave and talk to a person who is psychotic. There are no set rules, however, some general guidelines can be helpful.