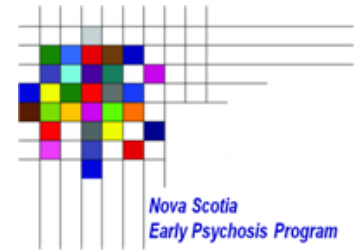


Four Key Findings in Early Psychosis



Here are four key findings that have arisen from research conducted over the last twenty years. Together they offer the basis for successfully working with psychosis to prevent disability and promote recovery.

1. Psychosis occurs in stages

For most people, psychosis develops in stages over a period of time. For some people, the stages go by quickly in days or weeks, but for most people the stages develop over months and years.

In the early stages, before psychosis is fully developed, a person often experiences symptoms of anxiety or depression or both. Treatment of the anxiety and depression appear to help prevent further development of psychosis.

As with many other disorders, treatment in the early stages of psychosis can be less intense and invasive, and is generally more effective.

2. Early, stage-specific, multi-component treatment is effective

Effective treatment for psychosis is available. The vast majority of young people who experience psychosis are able to recover and lead meaningful lives.

Treatment is most effective when it

- begins as early as possible in the course of the disorder
- is tailored to the stage of psychosis the person is experiencing
- has multiple components including
 - mutually respectful relationships with care providers
 - realistic optimism and hope
 - psychological support
 - medications
 - support for resuming social roles
 - support for families

Pathways to care are the steps that a person can take to access effective treatment. Current research shows that these pathways have barriers, which are often due to a lack of information. Such barriers need to be addressed so that young people can get early and effective care.

3. Family support is an essential component of optimal care

Research evidence compelling shows that educating and supporting family members is a powerful and effective part of treating a young person's psychosis. Effective treatment, therefore, supports not only the person experiencing psychosis, but their family members as well.

The challenges facing family members are significant and require support programs that are well designed and conducted. In Nova Scotia progress has been made in making such programs available, but much more work, and more resources, are needed to make these programs universally accessible.

4. Psychosis is not a progressive brain disorder

In the past people have often viewed psychosis as a progressive disorder, imagining the affected person getting worse and worse as time goes on.

Recent evidence, using advanced brain-scanning techniques, shows that the changes in brain function associated with psychosis do not progress over time. This finding suggests that, with optimal multi-component treatment, there is no biological reason why people with psychosis should get worse over time.

It is essential for professional care providers, as well as family members and young people experiencing psychosis, to understand that for most people psychosis is not a progressive disorder that inevitably gets worse. In the past, people with psychosis were often told that they could not aspire to leading meaningful lives. Messages like these can have devastating effects and interfere with the ability to recover.

Now, as people with psychosis access better treatment, it is becoming evident that leading a meaningful life is not only a reasonable goal, but is becoming the norm for people with psychosis.

For more information visit earlypsychosis.medicine.dal.ca.

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