



EARLY DETECTION & TREATMENT OF PSYCHOSIS EDUCATION SERIES

Unmasking Psychosis

"It was like I was having a million thoughts all at once and yet I was so disorganized, nothing was getting done. I was frightened and anxious because I felt someone was trying to harm me. Increasingly, I spent most of my time alone in my room doing nothing. I didn't want to be bothered with friends or family. The television started having special messages meant only for me and I was hearing voices commenting on what I was doing. Looking back, I realize things just weren't making sense anymore. At the time though, it seemed normal and I didn't mention what was happening with me to anyone. Since getting treatment, I understand that I was experiencing a health problem called psychosis."

This is how one individual described the experience of psychosis, a common condition that can happen to anyone.

Psychosis is a term for a treatable medical condition which results from changes in brain functioning. Individuals experiencing psychosis experience some loss of contact with reality.

The brain is involved in thinking (reasoning & judgement), feeling (emotions), understanding information gathered by the five senses (perception) and behaviour. Psychosis can disturb some or all of these brain functions. **The way psychosis affects people varies greatly from one individual to another.** Symptoms can also change over time. Some common indications are described below.

Changes in Thinking

"I believed that people were trying to poison my food. Although my family tried to convince me that my food was safe, I couldn't believe them. Eventually, I thought they were part of the plan to kill me. That was a very frightening time. It seemed so real."

A **delusion** is a belief about something that others in the community would not support. The person having a delusion often holds this belief no matter what others say or do to prove that it is not true.

Other changes in thinking may include: decreased concentration, speeding up or slowing down of thoughts, times when the mind goes temporarily blank, and a sense that thoughts are jumbled or controlled by others.

Changes in Perception

Perception refers to the way a person understands the information which is being received from the senses. While psychotic, some people say that their "senses play tricks on them".

"I was in my room and I heard someone calling my name. I didn't recognize the voice and when I checked there was no one else in the house. Several days later I heard the same voice commenting on what I was doing. I asked my friends but no one else heard it."

Hallucinations occur when an individual sees, hears, feels, smells or tastes something that others do not experience. Hallucinations make it difficult to focus on other things and may interfere with sleep. They are often frightening, or at times, a source of comfort. Hallucinations are very real to the person experiencing them.

Other perceptual changes may include: difficulty recognizing familiar things, changes in sensitivity to sights, sounds and other stimuli in the environment.

Changes in Feelings

“My wife told me that our son had been in a serious car accident and I began to laugh. I felt sad inside, but I couldn’t stop myself from giggling. It was as if my thoughts and emotions were disconnected.”

Individuals who are psychotic may display a different emotion than they usually would in the situation if they were not ill. After recovery, people describe themselves as having felt “empty” or “cut off” from feelings.

Severe **mood swings** can occur. A person may have increased activity and rapid speech. Others may have a persistent **low mood**, low energy, inability to sleep, decreased appetite and lack of interest in things around them.

Changes in Behaviour

People with psychosis may act differently than they usually do. Changes can occur gradually over months or even years. Behavioural changes may be due to alterations in the way the brain is working or the effects of other symptoms.

“I wasn’t really aware of it but for a year prior to treatment my parents describe me as not being myself -- I didn’t want to do anything with anyone and I was really irritable. At times I said things which no one else could understand.”

Behaviour changes are often noticed by others. The most common change is **social isolation**. People may stop participating in their usual activities. They may spend increasing amounts of time alone doing very little, because the brain could be having difficulty translating a thought into an action. Everyday activities may seem too difficult to do. Starting an action and carrying it out is sometimes overwhelming.

Key Points

- Psychosis refers to a common medical condition in which there is some loss of contact with reality.
- Symptoms of psychosis vary, but usually result in changes in thinking, feeling or behaviour.
- Psychosis is treatable.

For More Information Contact:

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