

**EVIDENCE-BASED
TREATMENTS
FOR
SCHIZOPHRENIA:**

**Information for
Families and Other Supporters**

**American Psychiatric Association
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ARE THERE EFFECTIVE TREATMENTS FOR SCHIZOPHRENIA?

If a member of your family or someone close to you has been diagnosed as having schizophrenia, you should know that effective treatments exist. Developed and tested through extensive research, treatments can provide individuals with this disorder significant relief from their symptoms and improved opportunities to lead more fulfilling lives.

What types of treatments and treatment approaches are most effective?

Medications alone are not enough. Research points to the importance of making sure individuals with schizophrenia receive treatment that combines medication with psychosocial treatments, including psychological or “talk” therapy, family interventions, supported employment, assertive community treatment and skills training. Like all long-term disorders, schizophrenia can disrupt a person’s life and relationships with others, particularly with family members. As with other medical illnesses, individuals with schizophrenia and his/her clinician often request that family members or other loved ones be involved in treatment.

If you are involved in your loved one’s treatment for schizophrenia, it is critical to know the most important treatment strategies for schizophrenia. Following is a list of the treatments and treatment strategies experts consider most important for individuals with schizophrenia. These were identified as the most important treatments based on a comprehensive review of the latest and best available scientific research. To ensure the best possible treatment outcomes, it is important that these strategies be considered for individuals with schizophrenia.

You can learn more about these treatments and treatment approaches from the resource links listed at the end of this document.

ASSESSMENT AND GENERAL TREATMENT RECOMMENDATIONS?

- ✓ **Individualized Treatment Plans.** Individuals with schizophrenia should communicate openly with their clinician. This includes working closely with the clinician to develop an agreed upon plan of treatment which includes goals and expected outcomes of treatment, which are tracked in medical records.
- ✓ **Substance Use Problems.** Close monitoring and treatment of any substance use problems, including smoking, alcohol or other drug use is important. Substance use problems may interfere with treatment and cause other serious health and social problems.

- ✓ **Co-occurring Disorders.** Persons diagnosed with schizophrenia, like others who have been diagnosed with serious medical disorders, may become depressed or anxious. Closely monitoring symptoms of depression and anxiety is important. Symptoms may include depressed mood, trouble sleeping, overwhelming feelings of panic or fear, and changes in appetite. Treatments are available for these symptoms.
- ✓ **Aggressive Behaviors.** Persons diagnosed with schizophrenia should be monitored and receive treatment for behaviors that may be hurtful to themselves or others.

PSYCHOSOCIAL TREATMENTS

- ✓ **Illness Education.** It is important for persons suffering from schizophrenia and their family members to obtain information from the clinician about the effect of illness on the individual. They can learn various problem solving strategies, strategies to prevent relapse of symptoms, and strategies to manage symptoms and medication.
- ✓ **Family Intervention.** Family members who are involved in the treatment plan should have ongoing contact with the clinician throughout treatment. This will ensure that you have information on how to cope with the illness and related problems, as well as receive clinician support in times of crisis.
- ✓ **Supported Employment.** If employment is a goal for your family member or friend suffering from schizophrenia, then supported employment programs should be explored. Supported employment includes individualized job development, rapid job placement, ongoing job support, and integration of vocational and mental health services.
- ✓ **Assertive Community Treatment Programs.** For individuals who are at high risk for being re-hospitalized, have problems with continuing in traditional services, or are recently homeless, Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) programs can be helpful. ACT includes a multidisciplinary team (including a psychiatrist) that provides direct services to your family member or friend suffering from schizophrenia. The individual will receive frequent contacts from ACT team members including outreach for those in the community.
- ✓ **Psychotherapy.** For individuals with schizophrenia who continue to have symptoms even after receiving adequate doses of medication, cognitive behaviorally oriented psychotherapy (CBT) can be helpful.

TREATMENT WITH MEDICATIONS

- ✓ **Treatment with Antipsychotic Medications.** Ongoing treatment with antipsychotic medications for this illness is important.
- ✓ **Monitoring for Side Effects.** Routinely monitor for any negative side effects of medications, if they occur, follow up with a clinician soon after problems are detected.
- ✓ **Clozapine as a Treatment Option.** If your family member or friend has not responded, or has had intolerable side effects to standard medications, he or she should discuss if treatment with clozapine is an appropriate option. Treatment with clozapine must include close monitoring of side effects, and routine blood tests.
- ✓ **Injectable Maintenance Treatment Option.** If your family member or friend has a history of frequent relapse on oral medications or a history of problems with adherence on oral medications, long-acting injectable antipsychotic medication maintenance treatment may be an appropriate option that can be discussed with his or her clinician.

HOW CAN I MAKE SURE MY FAMILY MEMBER OR FRIEND RECEIVES OR IS OFFERED THESE TREATMENTS?

- ✓ It is important to note that in certain instances, the clinician treating your family member or friend may not consider these treatments to be appropriate for your loved one. In addition, treatments such as supported employment or programs of assertive community treatment often are not readily available in communities. You can try and find these treatments in other mental health centers or in other counties or cities. You could also contact your local National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (www.nami.org).
- ✓ Finally, continuous treatment is strongly recommended; even when there are no breaks in treatment, symptoms can continue or re-occur. So it is important for individuals with this disorder to work closely with their treatment provider and communicate openly to make a difference in the effectiveness of treatment.

Sometimes, the symptoms of schizophrenia can make a person reluctant to speak openly with his or her treatment team, especially when the symptoms are worsening. If you think this is happening, it may be appropriate for you to contact the treatment team directly and inform them of your concern.

WHERE CAN I OBTAIN MORE INFORMATION ON THESE AND OTHER TREATMENTS WHICH HAVE BEEN SHOWN TO BE EFFECTIVE?

For More Information on Evidence-Based Treatment Recommendations for Schizophrenia:

American Psychiatric Association Practice Guideline for the Treatment of Schizophrenia www.psych.org/psych_pract/

Lehman AF, Kreyenbuhl J et al., The Schizophrenia Patient Outcomes Research Team (PORT) updated treatment recommendations 2003. *Schizophrenia Bulletin*, 2004, 30; 193-217

Evidence-Based Practices Toolkits:

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

www.mentalhealth.org/cmhs/communitysupport/toolkits/

www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cmhs/communitysupport/toolkits/cooccurring/

www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cmhs/communitysupport/toolkits/family/

www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cmhs/communitysupport/toolkits/employment/

www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cmhs/communitysupport/toolkits/community/

www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cmhs/communitysupport/toolkits/illness/

Implementing Evidence-Based Practices Project www.mentalhealthpractices.org

Other Sources of Information for Patients and Families

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (<http://www.nami.org/>)

National Mental Health Association (<http://www.nmha.org/>)

American Psychiatric Association (<http://www.psych.org>)

National Schizophrenia Foundation (<http://www.nsfoundation.org>)



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