What is Schizophrenia?

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PSY 381

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Schizophrenia is a “chronic and severe mental disorder that affects how a person thinks, feels and behaves.” Someone with schizophrenia can have difficulties distinguish between what is real and what is imaginary; they can also have difficulty expressing normal and social situations. Schizophrenia is not what people think it is from split to multiple personalities. The majority of the people with schizophrenia are not violate and do not pose a danger to others. This serious disorder affects 1 in 100 people in the United States. Symptoms usually start between ages 16 and 30, but it is known to affect men earlier than women.

What causes schizophrenia is still unclear but many scientists recognize that the disorder tends to run in the families and that the person inherits or tends to develop the disorder. They also believe that it can be triggered by environmental events, like viral infections, malnutrition before birth or even psychological factors. But just like similar to some other genetically- related illnesses, schizophrenia appears when the body goes thru hormonal and physical changes like puberty. People with schizophrenia have a chemical imbalance of brain chemicals (serotonin and dopamine) which are neurotransmitters. (MHA) The imbalance between these neurotransmitters affects the way the person’s brain reacts to stimuli which explain why a person with this disorder may be overwhelmed by the loud sounds, sights and smells. This signs can also lead to hallucinations or delusions.

The signs of schizophrenia are different for every person. They can slowly develop from 6 months to years and sometimes suddenly. Some of the early signs are; hearing or seeing things, strange body positions, change in personality, constant feeling of being watched, feeling indifferent to important situations. Based on the symptoms a medical professional can use positive or negative different terms for the condition.

Positive symptoms are “added” to the person’s personality

* Illusions - they can feel like someone is constantly watching them or even feel like they are a famous person.
* Hallucinations- they can see, hear, feel and smell something that does not exist. The most common one is hearing voices giving them orders or making comments.
* Disordered thinking and speech- making own words and sounds and moving from one topic to another without making sense.

Negative symptoms are “lost” from the person’s personality

* Lack of motivation
* Social withdrawals
* Emotional unresponsiveness

In addition to the positive and negative symptoms there are five basic subtypes of schizophrenia and can be diagnosed by the combination of symptoms a patient experience.

* Paranoid schizophrenia – involves hallucinations or delusions. The person feels suspicious, persecuted or mixed combination of emotions.
* Disorganized schizophrenia – coherent of speech and disorganized behaviors and very fewer hallucinations or delusions.
* Catatonic schizophrenia – most of the symptoms are negative like bizarre behaviors, withdrawn, mute and negative.
* Residual schizophrenia – the person is no longer experiencing any of the mentioned symptoms they have no motivation in life.
* Undifferentiated schizophrenia – major mood like depression and a mixture of hallucinations, disorganized behavior and speech. But no type of symptoms dominates the behavior.

Unfortunately, no cure for schizophrenia exists treatment involves medications and therapy to fulfill a better life. The first step after being diagnosed is to determine which treatment would work better for the person. Antipsychotic medications are usually taken in a pill or as a shot once or twice a month. Another treatment is psychological treatment which can be a very broad term. Patients meet periodically with therapies to talk about problems and through therapy they can develop social and work skills to improve their lives and relationship. Other types of services that help people with schizophrenia are;

* Case management helps people access services and treatments.
* Rehabilitation programs help people regain skills.
* Employment programs assist individuals in finding employment or how to re-enter the workforce.
* Crisis services include 24hr hotline for after-hours counseling and hospitalization.

The outlook for people with schizophrenia is better every time. Although it still has no cure, the treatments work very well. Many people with schizophrenia improve enough to lead a successful life and independent. Further investigations continue and the Understanding on genetics, neuroscience and behavioral science to help scientists and health professionals to better understand the causes of this disorder and find a way to predict and prevent it. This work will help the experts to develop better treatments for people with schizophrenia can be done in life. We encourage the families and to the people who suffer from this disease to participate in clinical research. For updated information on the latest research on schizophrenia financed by the NIMH, see the web site of the NIMH batteries.

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