

Understanding Schizophrenia

WORKPLACE
TRAINING
& SUPPORT
SERVICE

What is Schizophrenia?
Symptoms of Schizophrenia
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Note on Stigma

What is Schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia is a chronic, debilitating and complex mental illness. It affects how a person thinks, feels, behaves, and manages emotions and decisions. In addition, schizophrenia is characterised by an inability to distinguish between what is considered to be 'real' and what isn't.

Symptoms of schizophrenia vary widely between people; and can range from being mild to severe. Some people may only ever experience one episode and upon treatment never relapse. Others may have more frequent episodes but remain well for most of their lives; and a small proportion will require high levels and frequent treatment and support.

Symptoms of Schizophrenia

Positive Symptoms

"Positive" refers to overt symptoms that should not be present. These include:

- Hallucinations
- Delusions
- Disorganized thoughts

Negative Symptoms

"Negative" does not refer to a person's attitude, but instead to a lack of characteristics that should be present. These include:

- Reduced speech, even when encouraged to interact (alogia)
- Lack of emotional and facial expression (affective flattening)
- Diminished ability to begin and sustain activities (avolition)
- Decreased ability to find pleasure in everyday (anhedonia)
- Social withdrawal (asociality)

Cognitive Deficits

Difficulties with following aspects of cognition can make it hard to live a normal life or earn a living:

- Memory
- Attention
- Planning
- Decision Making

Treating Schizophrenia

It is important to diagnose and treat schizophrenia as early as possible. Treatment is all encompassing and consists of:

- **Medication (to manage symptoms).** Medication needs to be reviewed regularly.
- **Therapy**
- **Psychosocial rehabilitation (goals, relationships, employment, living)**

Hospitalisation may be necessary at times if the person becomes unwell or they need a change/stabilisation in medication.

Note on Stigma

Schizophrenia is often misunderstood and/or feared by the public. The media tends to take the illness out of context for shock and entertainment value; particularly portraying people with schizophrenia as dangerous or violent. However, schizophrenia sufferers are generally not violent, unless they already had a criminal history prior to their illness. Mostly people with schizophrenia pose a higher risk to themselves (due to suicide) than other people. Unfortunately they are also more likely to be victims of violent crimes.