

Managing schizophrenia

Treatments are available to effectively manage schizophrenia and may help people with the condition to live as normal a life as possible. This can include returning to work or education, independent living and resuming social relationships.

Effective treatment of schizophrenia will typically include a combination of medication and a variety of psychosocial therapies and interventions, to help a patient manage the condition in their day-to-day life.^{1,2}

Medication

It is generally accepted that the symptoms of schizophrenia are a result of abnormalities in the transfer and processing of information within the brain. Nerve cells in the brain communicate with each other by releasing chemicals called neurotransmitters. Many of the symptoms of schizophrenia have been linked to abnormalities in the activity of two particular neurotransmitters, dopamine and serotonin.

Scientists believe that the 'positive' symptoms of schizophrenia (such as hallucinations or delusions) are mainly caused by excess dopamine activity in specific areas of the brain, while the 'negative' symptoms of schizophrenia (such as lack of emotional response, social withdrawal/depression, apathy and a lack of drive or initiative) are linked to excess serotonin activity or dopamine underactivity in other areas of the brain.

Older forms of schizophrenia medication ('typical' antipsychotics) tend to just target areas of dopamine overactivity in the brain, whereas newer treatments ('atypical' antipsychotics) target dopamine and serotonin³ to have an effect on both the positive and the negative symptoms of schizophrenia.

The earlier that a person with schizophrenia receives treatment, the greater the chance they will achieve better long-term outcomes⁴ and be able to enjoy a more normal life.

Taking medication continuously

Although people with schizophrenia can find it challenging to take their medication continuously, those who do so are more likely to avoid a relapse and being hospitalised⁵ and improve their chances of getting better.

There are strategies that can help people with schizophrenia take their medication continuously. Educating the person and their family about schizophrenia and schizophrenia treatment may be beneficial. In addition, some medications are available in long-acting formulations, so the person with schizophrenia doesn't have to remember to take a tablet every day.

Long-acting treatments

Long-acting treatments (LATs) are given once or twice monthly by healthcare professionals. They can be a more suitable treatment option and help to improve the carer/patient relationship, as the person with schizophrenia doesn't need to think about taking pills every day. They also allow for better transparency in case of non-adherence, as patients visit their healthcare professional to discuss their treatment at each

administration. By improving non-adherence, LATs also have the potential to reduce the probability of relapse and prevent brain tissue loss.⁶

Studies show that many people on long-acting treatments prefer them to daily oral treatments⁷ but both types of medication have advantages for different individuals.

Psychosocial therapies

Clinical guidelines recommend that the optimal treatment package for people with schizophrenia is a combination of medication along with psychotherapy, psycho-education and self-help.¹ Evidence suggests that early introduction of therapies incorporating social and psychological interventions, as well as medication, may be an important factor in realising a person's long-term goals.^{1,2}

Psychosocial therapies involve the person with schizophrenia talking to someone who is trained to help them explore their thoughts and feelings, and the impact these can have on their behaviour and mood. This understanding can help people with schizophrenia make positive changes by thinking or acting differently.

There are many different forms of psychosocial therapy. Examples include a trained therapist using cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) techniques with a patient, or a nurse educating a person with schizophrenia about the condition and how to cope with it. Psychosocial therapies can also include self-help groups, which have been shown to increase participants' social networks and improve their ability to engage in normal life activities.³

The appropriate choice of psychosocial therapy for the person with schizophrenia will depend on the individual's particular needs at different points in his or her life.

For more information

www.schizophrenia24x7.com

Funded by Janssen Pharmaceutica NV, Schizophrenia24x7 is a resource for patients, carers and healthcare professionals who are affected or know someone who is affected by schizophrenia or schizoaffective disorder. The website provides information on the disease, treatment options and also on getting better.

www.gamian.eu

The Global Alliance of Mental Illness Advocacy Networks-Europe (GAMIAN-Europe) is a patient-driven pan-European organisation that represents the interests of persons affected by mental illness and advocates for their rights. Their website provides information on their activities and research projects, publications and resources, and partnerships.

www.eufami.org

The European Federation of Associations of Families of People with Mental Illness (EUFAMI) is a democratic organisation committed to improving care and welfare for people affected by mental illness. Their website provides details about their mission, as well as updates on their activities and resources designed to support those affected by mental illness.

References

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