

School_Nurse Daily

Health

Newsletter

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Devotional Highlight

“Loving like Jesus”

As a young man struggled with his tie, an older woman encouraged her husband to help. Another stranger took a photo of the trio when the elderly man hunched over and began teaching the young man how to knot the tie. When this photo went viral online, many viewers left comments about the power of random acts of kindness.

Love one another, John stated (1 John 3:11), we see multiple examples of this demonstrated by Christ. Big or small, acts of kindness bring us a little closer to God. Take the moment today to whisper a kind word, act generously, or just see beyond your personal space and step out of our comfort zones to serve others. Love as Jesus loved us.

(Extract from Our Daily Bread)

Topic of the Month

Schizophrenia

WARNING: long newsletter alert, but an AMAZING read!



Strange topic for us to cover in a school setting, isn't it? Knowledge is a beautiful thing, and I am happy to be able to share this topic with you. A student of mine was diagnosed with Schizophrenia, and it is absolutely amazing to see schizophrenia manifest in a way that is not 'Bellevue' worthy. Many, due to cancelled culture, may shun the very idea of corresponding and interacting with someone with this condition, but I hope that with the content I will present in this edition, you may view Schizophrenia through a brand new lens.

On March 29, a 19 year old committed suicide, 2 days after complaining that she kept on hearing voices around the house. The day she committed suicide, she went into her grandmother's room looking at the cuts on her hand and said, 'these things that I do are some weird things'. The next time her family saw her was that same day, hanging, in her own bathroom (Cross J, 2023).

What is Schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia is a chronic disabling (limiting) condition that may have a significant negative impact on the individual and their family (Grover S, Avasthi A., 2019). The condition may manifest as hallucinations (false perception of things), delusions (false beliefs), and extremely disordered thinking and behaviour that limits your ability to function (Mayo Clinic, 2021).



When does it appear?

Schizophrenia can manifest at different times of an individual's life. A manifestation before 18 years of age is known as early-onset schizophrenia (EOS). Manifestation before the age of 13 years is categorised as very early-onset schizophrenia (VEOS), and known as childhood-onset schizophrenia (COS) (Grover S, Avasthi A., 2019). Though these occurrences are rare, they still happen. However, the peak age of onset for schizophrenia is noted to be 15-30 years.

How can it be identified?

Symptoms of schizophrenia vary from person to person. So, no one symptom can be used to broad-brush this diagnosis. However, these symptoms may be noticeable in the early stages (Mayo Clinic, 2021):

Alterations in thinking may manifest like:

- Problems with thinking and reasoning
- Bizarre ideas or speech
- Confusing dreams or television for reality

Alterations in behaviour may manifest as:

- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Trouble sleeping
- Lack of motivation — for example, this may manifest as a drop in performance at school
- Not meeting daily expectations, such as bathing or dressing
- Bizarre behaviour
- Violent or aggressive behaviour or agitation
Recreational drug or nicotine use

Alterations in emotions may manifest as:

- Irritability or depressed mood
- Lack of emotion, or emotions inappropriate for the situation
- Strange anxieties and fears
Excessive suspicion of others



You noticed I mentioned the early stages, correct? So, the later stages of schizophrenia may manifest as:

1. **Delusions:** though these are less likely to happen in children, these are false beliefs about reality. Such as believing that comments are directed at you (in milder cases)
1. **Hallucinations:** these are more likely to happen in children, where they believe they are seeing, hearing or feeling things that actually do not exist.
1. **Disorganised thinking:** this is usually due to an impaired communication process, where you'd realise that answers to questions asked are either partially or completely unrelated to the topic.
1. **Extremely disorganised or abnormal motor behaviour:** these behaviours may include resistance to instructions, inappropriate or bizarre posture, a complete lack of response, or useless and excessive movement.
1. **Negative symptoms:** this refers to reduced or lack of ability to function normally. For example, the person may neglect personal hygiene or appear to lack emotion — doesn't make eye contact, doesn't change facial expressions, speaks in a monotone. This person may also avoid people and activities or lack the ability to experience pleasure (Mayo Clinic, 2021).

What about suicide?

Individuals with schizophrenia are known to have suicidal thoughts, though they may not manifest in everyone diagnosed with it (Mayo Clinic, 2021).

With these symptoms highlighted, it is imperative that I acknowledge that these symptoms are those that we may experience on a day to day basis, based on how stressed we are. But by no means am I implying that you are schizophrenic. The diagnosis of schizophrenia has to be done by a physician that uses a diagnostic criteria to make an appropriate diagnosis. So, if you believe you have been experiencing most of these symptoms and you are concerned, visit your nearest health centre or physician, and have them take a closer look for you.



What causes childhood schizophrenia?

It is unclear what causes schizophrenia, as well as what causes childhood schizophrenia. However, it is believed that a combination of genetics, brain chemistry (imbalance in dopamine and glutamate neurotransmitters), and specific environmental situations may contribute to development of the disorder.

Complications of schizophrenia

Though there is no known definite cause of schizophrenia, there are possible complications of having untreated childhood schizophrenia. These may include (Mayo Clinic, 2021):

- Suicidal thoughts and attempts
- Self-injury
- Anxiety disorders, panic disorders and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)
- Depression
- Drug abuse
- Family conflicts
- Inability to live independently, attend school or work
- Social isolation
- Health and medical problems
- Legal/financial problems, and homelessness



Can it be prevented?

Sadly, there is no available research that notes how schizophrenia can be prevented, but early identification does offer better management of the illness.

How is it controlled?

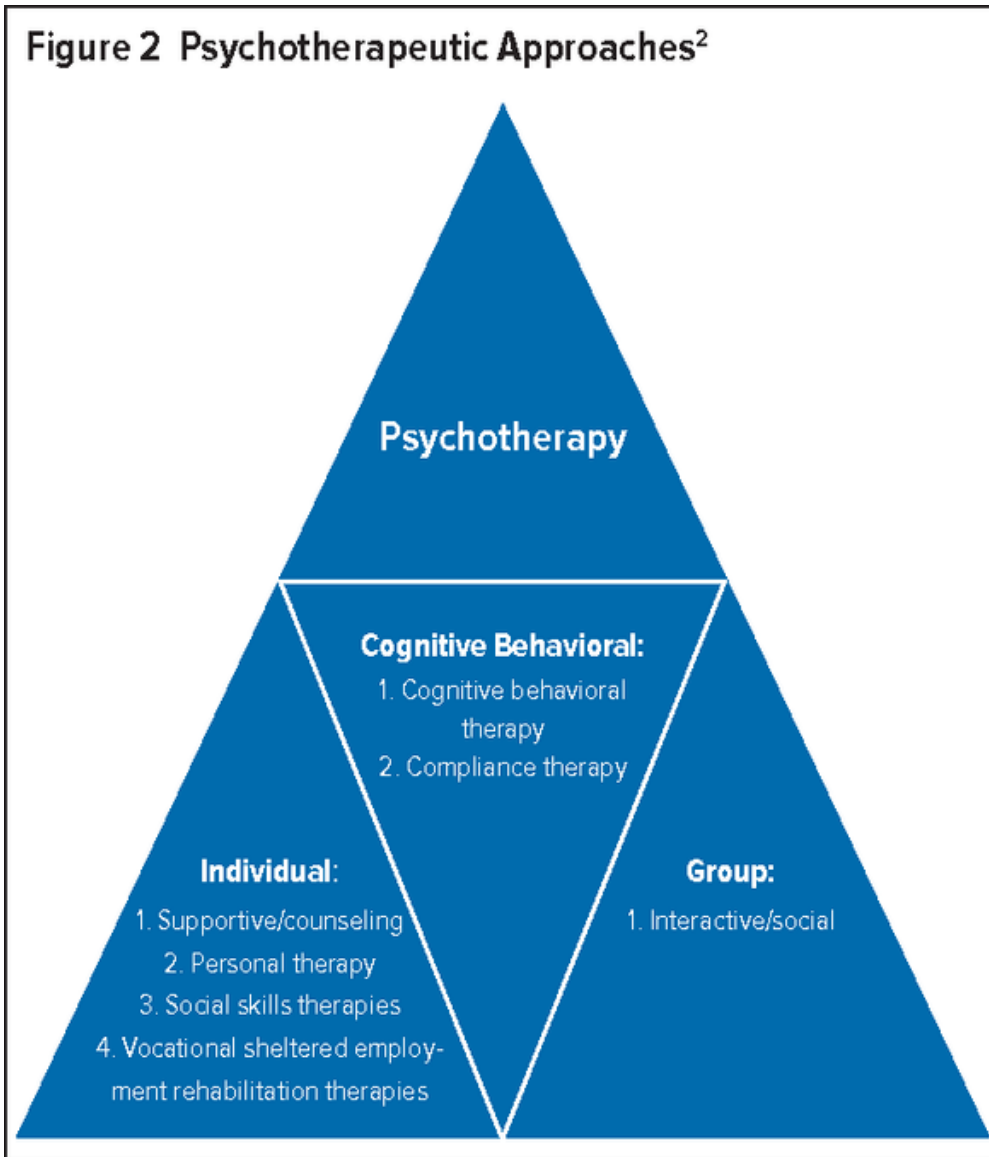
Treatment options for schizophrenia are holistic. Meaning, it goes beyond just medications. Relying only on controlling schizophrenia on medications may lead to relapse due to medications not aiding in controlling manifestations such as paranoia, self-mutilation, and even suicidal thoughts.

The treatment goal surrounds targeting symptoms, preventing relapse, and increasing adaptive (flexible) functioning of the individual, that way, they can function in society. Though pharmacotherapy (medications) is a vital aspect of management, it may leave residual symptoms that only psychotherapy can address (Patel KR, Cherian J, Gohil K, Atkinson D, 2014).

As such, treatments include:

- 1. **Pharmacotherapy - a wide range of medications**
- 2. **Psychotherapy**
 - a. **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)**
 - b. **Compliance Therapy**
 - c. **Social inclusion**
 - d. **Counselling**
 - e. **Social skills therapy**
 - f. **Employment Rehabilitation Therapy**

Figure 2 Psychotherapeutic Approaches²



10 Myths of Schizophrenia (Watson S, 2022) - Extract from WebMD

Myth No. 1: It means you have multiple personalities.

A person with schizophrenia doesn't have two different personalities. Instead, they have false ideas or have lost touch with reality. Multiple personality disorder is unrelated.

Myth No. 2: Most people with schizophrenia are violent or dangerous.

Even though people with schizophrenia can act unpredictably at times, most aren't violent, especially if they're getting treated. People with schizophrenia are more likely to be victims of violence. They are also more likely to harm themselves than others -- suicide rates among people with schizophrenia are high.

When people with this brain disorder do commit violent acts, they usually have another condition, like childhood conduct problems or substance abuse. But the disorder alone doesn't make you physically aggressive.

Myth No. 3: Bad parenting is the cause. Mothers, in particular, often get blamed.

But schizophrenia is a mental illness. It has many causes, including genes, trauma, and drug abuse. Mistakes you've made as a parent won't give your child this condition.

Myth No. 4: If a parent has schizophrenia, you'll get it, too.

Genes do play a role. But just because one of your parents has this mental illness doesn't mean you're destined to get it. You might have a slightly higher risk, but scientists don't think genes are the only cause.

Myth No. 5: People with schizophrenia aren't smart.

Some studies have found that people with the condition have more trouble on tests of mental skills such as attention, learning, and memory. But that doesn't mean they're not intelligent.

Many creative and smart people throughout history have had schizophrenia, such as Russian ballet dancer Vaslav Nijinsky and Nobel Prize-winning mathematician John Nash.

Myth No. 6: If you have schizophrenia, you belong in a mental hospital.

The level of care you need depends on how severe your symptoms are. Most people with schizophrenia live independently with family or in supportive housing in the community. It's important to be in close contact with your doctor, and to have support in place to help you continue your treatment as needed.

Myth No. 7: You can't hold a job if you have it.

Schizophrenia can make it harder for you to land a job and go to work every day. But with the right treatment, many people can find a position that fits their skills and abilities.

Myth No. 8: Schizophrenia makes people lazy.

The illness can make it harder for someone to take care of their daily needs, such as dressing and bathing. This doesn't mean they're "lazy." They just need some help with their daily routine.

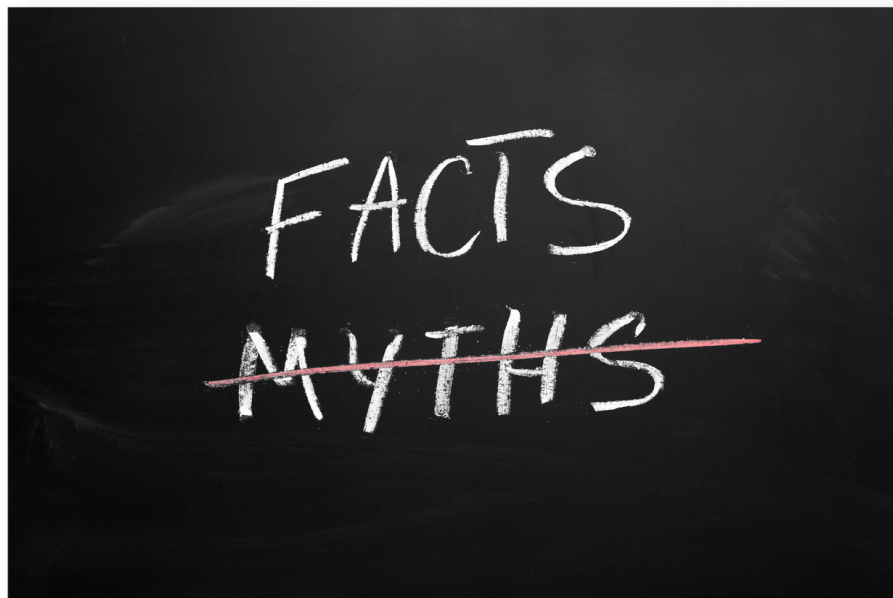
Myth No. 9: It comes on with a sudden psychotic break.

Some people have a big mental event that leads to a schizophrenia diagnosis. But symptoms can appear over time and are hard to notice.

Myth No. 10: You can never recover from it.

Antipsychotic medications help stabilise you, and lower the risk of future symptoms. Talk therapy and cognitive behavioural therapy are also helpful tools that can show you how to handle stress better and live well.

With the right medicine and therapy, about 25% of people with this disease will recover completely. Another 50% will see some improvement in their symptoms. Many people with the condition can live full, productive lives.



♥ Nurse D's Tip

Story time: While sharing the topics I'll be covering, on social media, a university friend reached out to me saying she is looking forward to this episode, as she was diagnosed with schizophrenia at the age of 15.

Her story was beautiful. She had the support of her family in her recovery. She completed high school at a private institution and gained her Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) subjects, even though physicians said she may not be able to. Starting and completing university, and now successfully in a long-term job, while running her own business. She also continues her therapy sessions that are only once monthly.

However, though she could have done all of that, she may not have been able to do so without treatment. And it is also important to highlight that she is still continuing treatment. She still takes her medications and attends therapy sessions. Was it easy? No, but that does not mean she didn't want to get better. Because of that, she ensured that she stuck to her treatment regime.

Yes, the diagnosis of schizophrenia is scary. Yes, you may be stigmatised and judged because of this, but what is of utmost importance is that you show up for yourself. Denying the fact that you are diagnosed with schizophrenia will only end up hurting you. It does you harm if you avoid the fact that you're hearing voices, or that you've been having hallucinations. It all starts with acceptance. It will not be easy, but research shows that it promises to get better. ♥

YOU CAN
DO IT!

♥ Dear Parents

It is important to know that the diagnosis of your child affects you just as much as it affects them. You are the ones taking care of them. You are the one who is left with the thoughts of 'I did not do enough' or 'what did I do wrong'. You are the one who is left with having to watch your children go through this life-changing disease. So, you are just as affected.

With the thought of this, you will also need therapy. You will need to be equipped with the appropriate skills to manage the illness of your child, and the mental wellbeing of the family. You will also need to be educated about the illness. Education brings strength and comfort. Knowing as much as you can about the ailment helps you understand the role you play in their recovery, as well as how to monitor them appropriately.

It will also ensure that you are cared for as well. Your mental wellbeing will be just as important to maintain. A healthy you = a healthy child. You will also need to have a strong mental coping and managing system in order to keep you healthy.

♥ Den Cu Yah!

- Stigma, discrimination, and violation of human rights of people with schizophrenia are common.
- More than two out of three people with psychosis in the world do not receive specialist mental health care.
- A range of effective care options for people with schizophrenia exist and at least one in three people with schizophrenia will be able to fully recover. (WHO, 2022)

you can
do it!

Thank
YOU!

Disclaimer: The content on this newsletter should not be used in place of medical/professional consultation or advice, but to be used for educational purposes only.

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