



**Canadian Mental
Health Association**
Mental health for all

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Mental Illness Glossary

Some common mental illness terms and definitions.

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(Adapted from Breakthroughs in Antipsychotic Medications: A Guide for Consumers, Families and Clinicians and Trips & Journeys: Personal accounts of early psychosis. See Sources.)

Acute phase (of illness)

A worsening of a person's positive psychotic symptoms, often leading to out-of-control or bizarre behaviour.

Anti-psychotic medications are given to eliminate or reduce these symptoms.

Advocacy

Typically refers to activities that are used to raise the profile of an issue and mobilize the forces necessary to change public opinion, policy and practice.

Anti-depressant

Medication for the treatment of depression

Anti-psychotic

Medication for the treatment of psychosis

Bipolar disorder

A mood disorder characterized by periods of elevation in mood and depressive episodes.

Cognitive Therapy

(Also known as 'cognitive behaviour therapy') A therapy aimed at assisting the person to deal with some mental health problems by focusing on the way in which they interpret and react to their experience.

Conventional Antipsychotics

The group of antipsychotic medications developed between the 1950's and 1970's; also referred to as "neuroleptics" or "traditional" or "classic" antipsychotics. These medications are effective for positive (psychotic) symptoms and less effective for negative symptoms.

Delusions

Fixed beliefs that have no basis in reality.

Depot Therapy

A long-acting form of antipsychotic medication that is given by injection into a muscle approximately every 2-4 weeks.

Depression

A mood disorder represented by feelings of sadness, loneliness, despair, low self-esteem, withdrawal from interpersonal contact with others, and symptoms such as difficulty sleeping and a decreased appetite.

Dopamine

A neurotransmitter in the brain. Antipsychotic medications slow down dopamine's ability to transmit messages between nerve cells in the brain.

Drug-Induced Psychosis

Use of, or withdrawal from alcohol and drugs can be associated with the appearance of psychotic symptoms. Sometimes these symptoms will rapidly resolve as the effects of the substances wear off. In other cases, the illness may last longer, but begin with a drug-induced psychosis.

Dual diagnosis

Literally the presence of two diagnoses at the same time. When speaking of psychotic disorders, the term is usually used to mean a person who has both a major psychiatric disorder such as schizophrenia, and a substance use or alcohol problem.

Genetic disposition

A term to describe the degree to which an individual is at genetic risk of an illness being passed on from one generation to the next.

Hallucinations

Unusual perceptions, for example, hearing sounds or voices that are not there.

Manic depression

see Bipolar Disorder

Medication noncompliance

Not following a doctor's recommendation. This is very common among clients who are supposed to be taking antipsychotic medications. In part, this isn't any different from other medical conditions, such as high blood pressure, where noncompliance is also very, very common.

Mood Disorders

A set of psychiatric diagnoses in which the major problem is mood regulation. Mood may be too low

(depression), too high (mania), or too high at some times and too low at others (bipolar disorder).

Negative Symptoms

Think of these symptoms as features that are “taken away” or “subtracted” from the individual. They refer to experiences that should be present, but are absent. Some examples of negative symptoms include: blunted emotions, lack of energy or drive.

Neuroleptics

A term sometimes used to refer to conventional antipsychotic medications because they cause neurological (extrapyramidal) side effects. Because the newer atypical antipsychotics are much less likely to cause extrapyramidal side effects, this term is not used to refer to the newer medications.

Neurotransmitters

A chemical that is used to transmit a message between nerve cells in the brain. Two neurotransmitters that are very important in the treatment of schizophrenia are dopamine and serotonin.

Positive Symptoms

Symptoms that are ‘added on’. They are features that are present but should be absent such as hallucinations and delusions.

Psychosis

Describes conditions which affect the mind, where there has been some loss of contact with reality. When someone becomes ill in this way it is called a psychotic episode.

Psychosis can lead to changes in mood and thinking and abnormal ideas, making it hard to understand how the person feels. First episode psychosis simply refers to the first time someone experiences psychotic symptoms or a psychotic episode.

Prodrome

The first phase of a psychotic episode. The early warning signs are vague and hardly noticeable. There may be changes in the way some people describe their feelings, thoughts and perceptions.

Schizoaffective Disorder

A disorder in which the person has the symptoms of both a major mood disorder, such as major depression or bipolar illness and schizophrenia.

Schizophrenia

A psychotic illness in which the changes in behaviour or symptoms have been continuing for a period of at least six months. Symptoms and length of illness vary from person to person. Contrary to previous beliefs, many people with schizophrenia lead happy and fulfilling lives, with many making a full recovery.

Schizophreniform Disorder

This is just like schizophrenia except that the symptoms have lasted for less than six months.

SOURCES

Early Psychosis Prevention and Intervention Centre. (2000). *Trips & Journeys – Personal Accounts of Early Psychosis*. Melbourne, Australia.

Weiden, P., Scheifler, P., Diamond, R., & Ross, R. (1999). *Breakthroughs in Antipsychotic Medications: A Guide for Consumers, Families and Clinicians*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.



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