

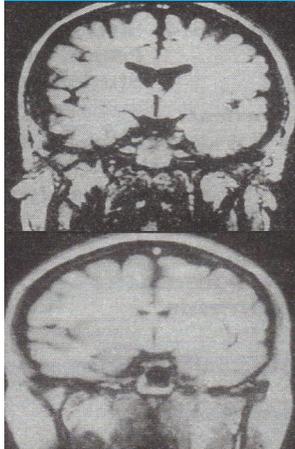


MONTHLY MENTAL HEALTH NEWSLETTER

Presented by the Gwinnett County Sheriff's Office Mental Health Task Force

In this issue: Schizophrenia

What is Schizophrenia?



Schizophrenic Brain of a male, age 22

Schizophrenia is a chronic brain disorder that affects less than one percent of the U.S. population. Symptoms can include delusions, hallucinations, disorganized speech, trouble with thinking and lack of motivation.

Normal Brain of a male, age 22

When the disease is active, it can be characterized by episodes in which the sufferer is unable to distinguish between real and unreal experiences.

Note the differences in brain structure in the MRIs at left

There are many Misconceptions and a great deal of Stigma regarding Schizophrenia...The TRUTH about Schizophrenics includes the following;

Schizophrenics do NOT have “split personalities.”

Schizophrenics do NOT have “multiple-personalities.”

Most people with schizophrenia are NOT any more dangerous or violent than people in the general population.

Most Schizophrenics are NOT homeless or live out their lives in hospitals.

Most people with schizophrenia live with their family, in group homes or on their own.

Schizophrenia is NOT contagious.

Schizophrenia is treatable in the majority of cases.

The causes of Schizophrenia are not known, but the victims have no choice in it. They are born with this illness and in most cases it goes undetected until it presents itself later in life.

While Schizophrenia can present at anytime in life typically it will first present in males in their late teens to early twenties and in females in their early to late twenties.

Did you know?

While Schizophrenia is NOT “life threatening”, Schizophrenics have a life span of just over 53 years as compared to the average population which has a life span of over 76 years. A 2015 study found that heart disease was the top cause of death in people with schizophrenia. COPD, Type II Diabetes and Lung Cancer were also common causes of death. Smoking prevalence for schizophrenic patients is higher than the general population. More than 60% of schizophrenic patients are current, heavy smokers, which contributes to excessive mortality in these patients. Smoking stimulates dopamine activity in the brain therefore it has been suggested that smoking may be an attempt by schizophrenic patients to alleviate cognitive deficits and to reduce sometimes severe side-effects induced by antipsychotic medication. The same medications may cause weight gain, diabetes, increases in blood glucose, cholesterol and high blood pressure.

Stigma also plays a role in this issue. Due to the prevalent stigma faced by these persons and the lack of community support their help seeking behavior is far below that of the average person.

Understanding the symptoms

Psychosis refers to a set of symptoms characterized by a loss of touch with reality due to a disruption in the way the brain processes information.

Delusions are fixed false beliefs held despite clear or reasonable evidence that they are not true. Persecutory (or paranoid) delusions, are when a person believes they are being harmed or harassed by another person or group.

Hallucinations are the experience of hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, or feeling things that are not there. They are vivid and clear with an impression similar to normal perceptions. Auditory hallucinations, “hearing voices,” are the most common in schizophrenia and related disorders.

Disorganized thinking and speech refers to thoughts and speech that are jumbled and/or do not make sense. These persons may switch from one topic to another or respond with an unrelated topic in conversation. The symptoms are severe enough to cause substantial problems with normal communication.

Disorganized or abnormal motor behavior are movements that can range from childlike silliness to unpredictable agitation or as repeated movements without purpose. This could also include retardation of movement and becoming almost motionless.

REFERENCES

The following sources were used in the creation of this Mental Health Newsletter. The G.C.S.O. Mental Health Tasks Force encourages you to utilize these and other sources such as the *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)* to learn more about this important health topic.

Diagnostic Statistical Manual –V, American Psychiatric Association, June 2013

National Institute of Mental Health (2020). Schizophrenia. Retrieved May 28 2021, from <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/schizophrenia/index.shtml>