Role of Mental Health in Society: Psychosocial treatments

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Recovery from mental illness: living an “ordinary” life in the community

- Across the world, more people with major mental illnesses are living in the community rather than spending long periods in hospital.
- This is humane and consistent with the hopes and aspirations of people with mental illness and their families.
- Most want to live as regular citizens - doing things that we all do, such as studying and working – whether or not they are free of the symptoms of their illness.
Recovery from mental illness: living an “ordinary” life in the community

- So, having friends and a job and experiencing a better quality of life & feeling empowered have become important goals for personal recovery.
- These aspirations are supported by the development of high-quality & comprehensive community mental health services.
- Modern medicines play an important role in reducing symptoms - but people with mental illness need more than this.
The second Australian survey of psychosis 2010: challenges faced

- Survey of almost 2000 Australians with psychotic illnesses e.g. schizophrenia
- Most were living in the community (98%)
- Asked to identify the top challenges they would face in the next 12 months, top 5 were:
  - Lack of money
  - Social isolation
  - Lack of employment
  - Poor physical health
  - Uncontrolled symptoms of mental illness
Recovery from mental illness: role of psychosocial treatments

- As well as medicines, psychosocial treatments are necessary therefore
- They are more focussed towards overcoming these challenges and helping achieve personal goals – assisting people with mental illnesses to play a role in society
- A number of psychosocial treatments have been shown to be effective by strong scientific research and are recommended in guidelines for mental health practice
Being employed

- Training to improve social skills
- Help to find and keep work
- Social contact
  - Helping the family and patient reduce their stress
  - Being employed
  - Symptoms of mental illness under control
- Better physical health
- More money
- Help to recognise and cope with a relapse
- Therapy to understand symptoms differently

- Help to find and keep work
Family psycho-education for people with psychotic disorders and their families

An example of the value of psychosocial treatments for mental illness in society
Need for family involvement in community mental health care

- Most families want to be involved in the treatment and care of their relative with mental illness and to assist with their recovery.
- Effective ways of involving families have been developed and are scientifically proven.
- These result in patients experiencing many improvements.
- These programs are known as **Family Psycho-Education**.
Need for family involvement in community mental health care

- Impacts of mental illness – confusion, grief, guilt, blame – are also experienced by relatives.
- In our Australian research, more than 40% of carers of people with severe mental illness were assessed as likely to be diagnosed with depression or anxiety.
- These carers were nearly 10 times more likely to be socially isolated than other people.

(Hayes, Hawthorne, Farhall, O’Hanlon & Harvey, submitted)
What is Family Psycho-Education and how does it work?

- We know that stress can lead people with mental illnesses to more frequent relapses of their illness.
- Family Psycho-Education helps to decrease relapses by reducing stress within the family.
- Family stress is decreased by providing education and teaching new skills to all family members.
- Families take part in 12 or more Family Psycho-Education sessions, over 6 months to 2 years.

*(Fadden, 1998; McFarlane et al, 2003)*
What is Family Psycho-Education?

- The patient and family are involved together
  - leads to greater understanding and helps to empower the patient
- Information about the illness is shared & discussed
- The family learns to recognise and cope better with a relapse
- Training is provided to improve how the family talk with each other and solve problems together
- Goal-setting is used to help all family members achieve their personal goals
What is the scientific evidence for Family Psycho-Education?

- In the last 40 years, there were more than 50 strong scientific studies (RCTs) that show that Family Psycho-Education works
  - For people with schizophrenia; also for people with bipolar disorder and major depression
- It can lead to the person with mental illness having half the usual number of relapses & admissions to hospital

(McFarlane et al 2012; Pharoah et al, 2010; Pilling et al, 2002; Pitschel-Walz et al, 2001)
How does Family Psycho-Education help with leading an ordinary life in society?

- For the patient:
  - More able to interact in the usual way in society
  - More likely to get employment

- For the family:
  - Feel less burdened by caring for their loved one
  - Better relationships with the patient
  - More able to get on with their own life

(Pharoah et al, 2010; McFarlane et al, 2003; Cuijpers, 1999)
Availability of Family Psycho-Education

- Family Psycho-Education is still not widely available around the world
- Mental health professionals need special training
- But trained staff only involve a few families (up to 3 or 4) unless other changes happen to support them
- We have learnt about many of the other changes needed in our research in Family Psycho-Education programs in Australia
What do families need from community mental health services?

- More family-friendly services, e.g.:
  - Services are open outside of office hours
  - Services will meet them in their homes, if preferred
- All families need early contact from the service that is treating their loved one
- Not all families need and want intensive programs like Family Psycho-Education
- But all families need information and discussion about what else could help them
How can we improve our mental health services so they involve families more?

- Psychosocial treatments should be given a higher priority
- Workloads should be low enough for staff to spend their time on involving families
- Each team should have a professional with time allocated to be the “champion for family involvement”:
  - To supervise and mentor other staff
  - To work with them in involving families
Conclusions

- Psychosocial treatments are important because they can help patients live as regular citizens in society.
- Staff need training in psychosocial treatments.
- But, so that psychosocial treatments are available to all those that need them, we also need to improve:
  - the types and variety of mental health services we offer to patients and their families.
  - the way we offer these services.
Thank you for listening
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