

Medication Treatment

Medications are an important part of the path to recovery. Over the last 50 years psychiatric medications have added much to the treatment of mental illnesses. Previously there were few effective treatments for the major mental illnesses. Most mental illnesses are biological disorders of the brain. Medications act directly to balance the brain abnormalities and to decrease symptoms such as hallucinations. Most medications do not cure the illness but they do treat it and decrease the symptoms. This is similar to using insulin in diabetes. Insulin treats the symptoms but doesn't cure diabetes.

Medications have become the mainstay in the treatment of many of the mental illnesses. Schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression, anxiety, ADHD, and others have effective medication treatment. That said, medications are not the only treatment for these illnesses. Psychotherapy, psychosocial rehabilitation, employment, peer support programs, and other non medication treatments are effective in decreasing the symptoms and increasing the patient's functioning in mental disorders.

As mentioned above medications do not cure mental illness but do treat the symptoms. Many times patient's symptoms do not respond to the medications. Or, some symptoms respond but others do not. An example is schizophrenia where many times the positive symptoms such as hallucinations and delusions decrease but the negative symptoms such as trouble holding a job do not respond.

Medications have many side effects and make it difficult for patients to take many of them. The older drugs caused symptoms of muscle rigidity, nervousness, and even depression. This problem has decreased over the last few years with newer drugs but there are new problems with the newer medications to include weight gain, increased blood pressure, and they may lead to diabetes. This and the fact that medications are not totally effective in many patients lead to frustration. The medications work over a period of weeks and maybe months. Also many medications may need to be tried before the right medication is found for the patient.

But, it has been shown that patients do better with medication. They are more functional, stay out of the hospital longer, and have fewer symptoms when taking their medication.

Finding a good psychiatrist who is willing to work closely with the patient is of utmost importance. In fact the relationship of the doctor and the patient may be as important as the medications themselves. A good relationship consists of trust, comfort with disagreements, and honesty with each other. The patient should be a partner with the doctor in the treatment of their illness. The patient should feel comfortable with the doctor to the point that they would feel okay telling the doctor even when they are not taking their medications.

Many times it may help to bring another person such as a relative or a case manager with the patient to the doctor visit. This person can aide the patient in asking questions they

may forget to ask. Also, this other person may be able to clarify what the doctor is asking or advice that they are giving. It is also advisable for the patient to write down in advance any questions they may have about their treatment before they go to their appointment with the doctor. Taking this list with them to the doctor will help them to remember any questions or concerns they may have.

In summary, medications are an integral part of recovery. Although medications are hard to take at times they do decrease the symptoms of mental illness. A good relationship with the psychiatrist is essential. Patients should not become discouraged if the first medication does not work well. Patients should work with their doctor to arrive at the best medication or best combination of medications for their illness.