

Common mental illnesses

By: Michelle Talsma Everson

Signs, symptoms and treatment options

On average, one in four adults experiences a mental health disorder in a given year, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness. With statistics like this, chances are you know someone dealing with mental health concerns or you are grappling with a mental illness yourself.

Types of mental illness

Some of the most common mental illnesses include depression, anxiety, stress and insomnia, said Brian Espinoza, M.D., P.C., a board-certified psychiatrist at St. Luke's Behavioral Health Center.

Other recognized mental health illnesses include bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and schizoaffective disorder.

Depression

While each mental health disorder has its own symptoms, there are some common indicators that something might be amiss. For example, Espinoza said that some of the signs of depression can be:

- Changes in emotions
- Lack of interest in normal activities
- Inability to perform in the workplace
- Depressed, ongoing moods that affect a person's home or social life
- Lack of appetite
- Restlessness and fatigue

“Like other diseases, there is no cure for mental illness, but you can manage and control it.”

— Brian Espinoza, M.D., P.C.,
board-certified psychiatrist, St.
Luke's Behavioral Health Center

Bipolar disorder

Karen Chaney, M.D., is the medical director of adult services at Magellan of Arizona, an organization that manages a publicly funded behavioral healthcare delivery system for Medicaid, non-Medicaid and Title XXI (KidsCare)-eligible residents in central Arizona. For those concerned about bipolar disorder, she said some signs to be aware of are:

- Episodes where the person may hear voices or be delusional
- Severe mood swings
- Individuals may appear to others to be acting “out of control”
- Inability to sleep or not feeling the need to sleep

Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia often appears when someone is in their early 20s, Chaney noted, adding that common indicators of schizophrenia can include hearing voices and being paranoid.

“It [schizophrenia] might be missed; if you suspect you might have symptoms of it you need to get help quickly,” she said.

Schizoaffective disorder

Another mental illness that is often under-diagnosed is schizoaffective disorder, said Tara Peyman, N.D., a naturopathic doctor at the Arizona Natural Health Center in Tempe.

According to the U.S. National Library of Medicine, schizoaffective disorder involves a loss of contact with reality (known as psychosis) and mood problems. Some of its symptoms can include:

- Problems with moods
- Issues with daily functions such as sleeping, concentrating and a lack of concern for personal hygiene
- Disorganized, illogical speech
- Delusions and paranoia

Treatment options

Treatment outcomes for mental illness vary per patient and with the severity of the disease. For example, if a person stays in a psychiatric hospital, they would leave with a treatment plan that might include a day program or intensive group counseling. Other times, patients can simply integrate their new medication into their daily lives.

For those who shy away from conventional medicines, Peyman said that there are homeopathic treatment options. “With homeopathy, there are no side effects, no interactions and it doesn’t add anything to your system,” Peyman said.

“It [homeopathy] works with your body to have a balancing and stabilizing effect.”

The next step

For those who may suspect they are or a loved one is affected by a mental illness, the next step is often to meet with a primary care physician to discuss any concerns. There are also resources such as Magellan of Arizona’s Crisis Hotline (800-631-1314) where you can call to ask general mental health questions.

Just like a physical illness, treatment plans for mental disorders vary per patient. Some of the most common treatments include medication and individual or group therapy. “For extreme situations, being admitted to an in-patient psych hospital or mental health [facility] may be the best option,” Espinoza said.

Recovering from Stigma

While awareness of mental disorders has improved, many professionals in the mental health arena admit that there are still misconceptions about mental illness.

“We’d like to take the stigma out of mental illness; it’s no different than a physical illness, it just happens to involve one’s brain,” said Karen Chaney, M.D., the medical director of adult services at Magellan of Arizona.

Resources

Arizona Natural Health Center:
aznaturalhealth.com

Family Involvement Center:
familyinvolvementcenter.org

Magellan Health Services
magellanofaz.com

National Alliance on Mental Illness Arizona
namiaz.com

St. Luke’s Behavioral Health Center
stlukesbehavioralhealth.com