

Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is the descriptive term for a group of psychotic disorders in which personal, social and occupational functioning deteriorate as a result of disturbed thought processes, strange perceptions, unusual emotional states, and motor abnormalities. It is a debilitating disorder. The social and psychological costs of schizophrenia are tremendous, both to patients as well as to their families and society.

Symptoms of Schizophrenia:

The symptoms of schizophrenia can be grouped into three categories, viz. positive symptoms (i.e. excesses of thought, emotion, and behaviour), negative symptoms

(i.e. deficit deficits of thought, emotion, and behaviours), and psychomotor symptoms.

Positive Symptoms are 'pathological excesses' or 'bizarre additions' to a person's behaviour. Delusions, disorganized thinking and speech, heightened perception and hallucinations, and inappropriate affect are the ones most often found in schizophrenia.

Many people with schizophrenia develop delusions. A delusion is a false belief that is firmly held on inadequate grounds. It is not affected by rational argument, and has no basis in reality. Delusions of persecution are the most common in schizophrenia. People with this delusion believe that they are being plotted against, spied on, slandered, threatened, attacked or deliberately

victimised. People with schizophrenia may also experience delusions of reference in which they attach special and personal meaning to the actions of others or to objects and events. In delusions of grandeur, people believe themselves to be specially empowered persons and in delusions of control, they believe that their feelings, thought and actions are controlled by others.

People with schizophrenia may not be able to think logically and may speak in peculiar ways. These formal thought disorders can make communication extremely difficult. These include rapidly shifting from one topic to another so that the normal structure of thinking is muddled and becomes illogical, inventing new words or phrases, and persistent and inappropriate repetition of the same thoughts. Schizophrenics may have

hallucinations, i.e. perceptions that occur in the absence of external stimuli. Auditory hallucinations are most common in schizophrenia. Patients hear sounds or voices that speak words, phrases, and sentences directly to the patients or talk to one another referring to the patients as s/he. People with schizophrenia also show inappropriate affect, i.e. emotions that are unrelated to the situation.

Negative Symptoms are pathological deficits and include poverty of speech, blunted and flat affect, loss of volition, and social withdrawal. People with schizophrenia show alogia or poverty of speech, i.e. a reduction in speech and speech content. Many people with schizophrenia show less anger, sadness, joy and other

feelings than most people do. Thus they have blunted affect, some show no emotions at all, a condition known as flat affect. Also patients with schizophrenia experience avolition or apathy and an inability to start or complete a course of action. People with this disorder may withdraw socially and become totally focused on their own ideas and fantasies.

Psychomotor symptoms - People with schizophrenia also show psychomotor symptoms. They move less spontaneously or make odd grimaces and gestures. These symptoms may take extreme forms known as catatonia. People in a catatonic stupor remain motionless and silent for long stretches of time. Some show catatonic rigidity, i.e. maintaining a rigid, upright

posture for hours. Others exhibit catatonic posturing i.e. assuming awkward, bizarre positions for long periods of time.

Sub-type of Schizophrenia

According to DSM-IV-TR, the subtypes of schizophrenia and their characteristics are:

Paranoid type: Preoccupation with delusions or auditory hallucinations; no disorganised speech or behaviour or inappropriate affect.

Disorganised type: Disorganised speech and behaviour; inappropriate or flat affect; no catatonic symptoms.

Catatonic type: Extreme motor immobility; excessive motor inactivity; extreme negativism