

Working with clients experiencing mental illness



This fact sheet summarises the Ask LOIS webinar on this topic, presented by Terry Kirkpatrick, Psychologist, on 24 June 2014. This webinar can be viewed for free at www.asklois.org.au/webinars/past-webinars.

This fact sheet covers:

- Understanding mental health
- Assessment and diagnosis
- Current mental health statistics
- Common mental health disorders
- Dealing with a mental health crisis
- Mental health services

Mental health

- Mental health is a state of wellbeing, how we the best of our abilities, cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and make a contribution to our community (*WHO, 2001*)
- Mental health is a sense of connectedness to others, exercising the power of choice, having control over one's environment and living in a community where everyone feels good about the way they live and the way they feel (*SAAHP, 2005*)

Mental distress vs mental illness

- At times we all experience episodes of **mental distress** that can interfere with our functioning and our enjoyment of life but we bounce back
- A **mental illness** is a diagnosable disorder or clinical condition that significantly interferes with a person's functioning and abilities and requires treatment intervention

Assessment of psychological disorders

- Assessment and diagnosis is based on the interpretation of a person's behaviour and level of functioning
- Diagnosis brings together:
 - Reported history and symptoms
 - Behavioural observation
 - Testing and analysis.
- Assessment of mental health issues allows for evidence based treatment and support

Assessment and diagnostic tools

- DSM – V: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders by American Psychiatric Society
- ICD – 10 - European version of DSM

Mental health statistics

- 45.5% experience a mental illness at some point in their lifetime
- Nearly half the Australian population will experience mental health issues
- 20% experienced mental disorders in previous 12 months
- In any 12 month period 1-in-5 of us will have mental health issues
- 1 in 7 Australians have anxiety disorders
- 1 in 16 have affective (mood) disorders
- 1 in 20 have substance use disorders
- 1 in just over 200 have psychotic disorders (of these 60% are experiencing episodes of schizophrenia or schizoaffective disorders)



Anxiety disorders

- A person feels very anxious, nervous or worried a lot of the time
- There may be no apparent reason or no rational reason for the level of distress experienced
- The level of anxiety interferes with their ability to function and enjoy aspects of life

Major anxiety disorders:

- Generalised Anxiety Disorder
- Panic Disorder
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder
- Agoraphobia
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Depression

- Everyone feels down from time to time and this experience of depression is part of life
- Clinical depression is the experience of a persistent feeling of sadness, without reason or beyond what would be expected in the situation and impacts on the person's capacity to get on with daily life

Common symptoms

- Feeling worried for no reason
- Reacting negatively to everything
- Losing interest in favourite activities
- Moving and talking slowly
- Sleeping badly or excessively but still feeling tired
- Either losing or gaining weight
- Losing interest in sex
- Feeling hopeless, guilty and that life is not worth living
- Thinking about killing oneself
- Worrying, without reason, about physical complaints

Common depressive disorders:

- Major reactive depression
- Dysthymia (called chronic depression)
- Cyclothymia
- Perinatal depression
- Seasonal Affective Disorder

Bipolar disorders

- Was called manic-depression
- Characterised by severe low and high moods, often with periods of normal moods in between
- An episode of bipolar low mood has similar symptoms to depression

Symptoms of extreme high mood

- Feeling extremely euphoric or irritable
- Talking fast and having lots of ideas that are not followed through
- Needing little sleep
- Spending extravagant and unrealistic sums of money
- Having grandiose thoughts and acting impulsively on them
- Being highly active; telephoning, texting, emailing or writing letters excessively; reckless driving; being highly sexually active
- Totally unaware of their inappropriate behaviour without sense of consequences to actions

Schizophrenia

- Medical condition affecting normal brain function
- Interferes with a person's ability to think, act and feel
- Episodic, ie, person has periods of acute illness while generally feeling well most of the time



Symptoms

- **Disordered thinking** – everyday thoughts become confused and don't join up properly leading to difficulty thinking and communicating clearly
- **Delusions** – false beliefs not shared by the general community that are impossible to change by logical argument
- **Hallucinations** – person hears, sees or otherwise perceives things that no one else does
- Very low motivation
- Withdrawal from others
- Difficulty expressing emotions
- Difficulty interacting socially

Assisting clients in crisis

- On occasions a client may become acutely mentally unwell in your office:
 - They may experience panic or extreme anxiety
 - They may be confused, agitated or fearful
 - They may be acting unreasonably or they may appear inappropriately aggressive

In these circumstances, remember the 4 C's:

- **Communicate**
 - Clearly in an understanding and honest manner
 - Don't crowd, rush or touch the person
- **Calm**
 - Stay calm and provide a calm, safe environment
 - Move to quieter more open spot if necessary
- **Confidence**
 - Behave in a quietly confident manner
 - Be firm but friendly and unthreatening
 - Reassure the person that everything will be OK
- **Call appropriate help**
 - Know the contact details for the local police and crisis mental health team
 - If person is known to the service contact their family/carer's or GP

Tips for working with clients with a mental illness

1. **Promote a positive view of mental health conditions** - Be open and avoid stereotyping. Use language that is not discriminatory or judgemental
2. **Use active listening:** Start with open-ended, non-personal questions, gradually becoming more focused. Try not to ask leading questions and check regularly you have understood by seeking clarification
3. **Don't make assumptions about the impact of mental health issues on people's skills and abilities** – symptoms can range in severity and be episodic
4. **Aim to empower your clients** – encourage them to take control over their lives
5. **Know the boundaries of your job description and what is appropriate**
6. **Know where to refer clients**
7. **Debrief with colleagues where necessary**

Mental health services

- **GP's** – can provide an assessment, diagnosis and prescribe treatment. They may refer to other professionals
- **Psychologists** – specialise in treatment of mental health issues, particularly the high prevalence disorders of anxiety and depression



- **Psychiatrists** – medical doctors who specialise in the study and treatment of mental illness. They can prescribe medication, provide psychiatric treatments and refer to other services
- **Community mental health services (CMHS)**
 - Public mental health services are generally based in community clinics or linked to mental health wards in local hospitals
 - CMHS provide a range of clinical services for people severely affected by mental illness and have case workers who manage the client's care plan
 - Many hospitals with acute psychiatric units have a crisis team to deal with mental health emergencies

Referrals

- **Mental Health Crisis line** - 1800 011 511
- **1800 18 SANE (7263)** – provides information about symptoms, treatments, medications, where to go for support and help for carers. SANE also provides a Helpline Online service. (www.sane.org/information/helpline/helpline-online)
- **Beyond Blue** - 1300 22 4636 - www.beyondblue.org.au - telephone (24/7) and online (4pm - 10pm) for depression, anxiety and related disorders
- **Lifeline** – 13 11 14
- **Q Life** - 1800 184 527 - counselling and referral service for people of diverse sex, genders and sexualities including mental health assistance
- **Eheadspace** - 1800 650 890 - www.eheadspace.org.au - a confidential, free and secure space where young people 12 - 25 or their family can chat, email or speak on the phone with a qualified youth mental health professional,
- **Legal Aid Mental Health Advocacy Service (MHAS)** - 02 9745 4277 - free independent advice about all areas of mental health law
- **Suicide Call Back Service** - 1300 659 467 - A free service for people who are suicidal, caring for someone who is suicidal, bereaved by suicide or are health professionals supporting people affected by suicide
- **Health Direct:** 1800 022 222 free 24-hour telephone health advice line staffed by Registered Nurses who provide expert health advice
- **National Health Service Directory** - www.nhsd.com.au - find local doctors, emergency services and hospitals. Local doctors can refer people to social workers and psychologists