

Psychosis and physical health: What do young people and their parents think?

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ABSTRACT

Introduction/Background

Young people experiencing first episode psychosis are usually prescribed antipsychotic medication to treat their psychotic symptoms. However, antipsychotic medications are known to affect the person's physical health and cause issues such as weight gain and cardiovascular diseases. In addition, when young people experience a psychosis they may have reduced social interactions due to the symptoms of the illness. They may make poor lifestyle choices and often have co-occurring drug and alcohol misuse. All of these increase their risk of developing co-morbid physical health issues and having a reduced life expectancy when compared to young people who do not have a psychosis.

Aim/Purpose of the project

To present research findings that investigated how young people with first episode psychosis who are prescribed antipsychotic medication managed their physical health, and what their parents felt about their child's level of physical health following diagnosis of a mental illness.

Methods/Process/Who is being studied

Grounded theory methodology was used to guide the research. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with: a) 24 young consumers whose care was coordinated by one metropolitan community mental health service, and b) 16 parents. All participants provided informed consent to participate in interviews conducted between 2015 and 2016.

Results/Outcome

Six categories emerged during data analysis to describe young people's increasing awareness of physical health changes from the time of diagnosis and commencing antipsychotic medications. Their parents also provided experiences of witnessing changes to their child's level of physical health and the strategies they employed to assist them to focus on maintaining their level of physical health.

Recommendations/Conclusion

Young people and their parents should be included in care planning to assess their care needs. They should be educated about the importance of maintaining healthy lifestyles following diagnosis. First episode psychosis program should focus on maintaining mental and physical health to support consumer wellbeing.