

Q & A Mindline



Dr Roshan Jain

Senior Consultant Psychiatrist & De-addiction Specialist
Apollo Hospitals, Bangalore

Q I have been suffering from depression for the last 12 months and at last, I decided to see a psychiatrist. I was given the medicine called escitalopram. How long does it take to feel better? I am becoming impatient.

I am surprised you waited for so many months to seek help. It has become quite common, especially in India - people suffer for months before they contemplate help. And when help is sought, it's done at the insistence of others, usually family. I think the delay is partly due to our culture of 'self-denial' (denial of one's own interests and needs for others) and lack of awareness of emotional problems, but largely due to the stigma of mental illness.

Individuals who go through mental health problems, including depression, experience many challenges, loss of interest in life's pleasures, dark moods, maintaining expectations (from self and others), isolation, social stigma, as well as dealing with, or fearing the side-effects of medicines. It gets worse, when they also undergo painful self-stigma. This is a less known condition whereby individuals

internalize prejudices and social myths about mental health illnesses. Hence, self-stigma acts as a barrier preventing individuals from seeking help and impedes their recovery.

Medicines contribute to early recovery, but efforts must be placed to understand the triggers and stressors and working through it. Recovery is a process, therefore you must pay attention to notable improvements in your mood with better ability to function since the initiation of the treatment. You are on a commonly prescribed and effective antidepressant at present. I hope you are in receiving (talk) therapy sessions to address emotional issues.

Don't lose patience, as recovery is certain. It all depends on you, your aspirations/expectations as well as nature and degree of your difficulties. I suggest you explore these very areas during your next consultation. And remember, after every dark night emerges a sunny morning! A dark night cannot last longer than it should.



Q I see a psychiatrist who is very busy and only gives me 30 minutes during each consultation. I get frustrated when he doesn't reply to my calls or offers me advice when needed. What do I do? Please help.

Psychiatric consultations can vary from 30 to 90 minutes. The first consultation is longer, but subsequent ones can be as short as 15 minutes, if it only entails clinical update. One needs to know if future consultation is a follow up appointment or a therapy session with an agenda to address specific areas of difficulties. These aspects should be discussed initially, so that the nature of therapeutic work and time commitment (from both sides) are pre-agreed.

Keep in mind that all clinical sessions are time limited, and must have an appropriate fee remuneration depending on expertise, intensity of clinical work and time offered. All psychiatrists are busy, but then if you have an appointment and a prior arrangement for sessions then your psychiatrist should offer it. Consider the above aspects and clarify it at your next session.

I think you should refrain from making direct calls to your psychiatrist, or for that matter any doctor, unless there is a prior arrangement with pre-agreed timings. In case of a medical emergency, head to the hospital rather than waiting in frustration over the other end of the phone and putting your health at risk. If it is a non-emergency situation, with a mere question, then leave a message or email and allow your psychiatrist to get back to you. This is a non-intrusive and professional manner of communication.

By calling the doctor at an odd time, hampers his clinical care. Just imagine your doctor/psychiatrist taking a call to offer advice and support to people on the phone, whilst your consultation is underway. I think it would be unfair and compromises the quality of consultation and I don't think you would like that. Therefore, be mindful about causing disturbances in your doctor's clinical work.