

Q & A Mindline



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Q My parents are unable to accept my mental health problems and the recent diagnosis of schizophrenia made by my psychiatrist. How do we go about things, as the pressure they put on me to be 'normal' is abnormally high! Please help.

It is a difficult time for you and them. It can be hard for the family as they may be grieving the loss of your health and their perceived fears of your inability or limitation to lead a 'normal' life.

Both you and your family are required to be in the present and address the issues at hand. These include the need to understand your health problems, learn more about suggested diagnosis and the outcome of the illness with or without treatment, including knowledge of side effects of the medication proposed. Ensure all of you attend appointments to be on the same page for understanding and get ongoing information, support and education.

Unfortunately, it seems that your family has moved ahead of time and is anxiously worrying about your future and how the illness may impact your life. Clearly, their worries are uninformed. I suggest you read up on schizophrenia from the Royal College of Psychiatrist's website document, as this

will provide some initial understanding and information and act as a baseline to question your clinician at the next visit.

Equally, I think it is worth reading about High Expressed Emotions (EE). This is a measure of family environment formed on the basis of how a psychiatric patient's family behaves and talks about him/ her. The families who score high on this EE scale tend to be critical, over-involved, hostile and have less tolerance for the patient. This behaviour is guided by a desire to be helpful, but quite the contrary happens.

In the process, they criticise all actions relevant to the disorder or not - these actions may just be unique to the patient's personality. Research has established that a high expression of emotion is a probable cause of relapse of illness as compared to low expression of emotion.

Further, family therapy sessions will help reduce expressed emotions. Herein, the therapist facilitates each member's expression of concern and worries without being critical or punitive. These sessions can address associated emotion and grief issues and work through them in an adaptive manner. Importantly, one's embedded fear and anxieties and stigmatising attitude towards mental health problems, which can take over rationality, are explored in a supportive way.

Equally, you need to attend regular sessions with your psychiatrist, wherein you ensure that all your concerns, questions and feelings are addressed promptly. Your awareness of your health issues and underlying sense must be dealt with, so that you engage with consultation, therapy and medicinal regime for a better long-term outcome.

Q My wife had few episodes of what seem like a convulsion, after a brain scan and other tests, neurologists have ruled it out. The cardiologist and

physicians too have ruled out heart problems or other health problems. However, she keeps having the spells, wherein she becomes mute and even kind of faints. We have been married for two years, but are not getting along well. She also has lots of problems with the rest of my family. Please advise a way forward.

Coincidentally, I recently dealt with a similar case, wherein the patient admitted of similar episodes, but there was no discernable neurological, heart or any medical condition. I assessed her for an opinion and treatment. We agreed that the patient was experiencing a dissociative state, mainly due to severe stress and adjustment difficulties.

When I spoke to the person, it turned out that she was having great difficulties in adapting and adjusting to her life after an arranged marriage, two years ago. I think in your wife's case, structured counselling or therapy sessions would be a good start. Such sessions will help get a better insight of the difficulties and enable her to accept the changes in her life, changes that she chose and planned. Consequently, she needs to adjust with herself before she adjusts with others.

Separating from in-laws and becoming a nuclear family may be an option, but with ageing parents who need support, this is not always possible or viable. Equally, if she can befriend some, if not all members of the family, then this will help her build the support network.

Also, she must address the emerging issues promptly and resolve them at the earliest. Therapy may help her acquire an insight and speak her mind, rather than lashing out. Meanwhile as a spouse, offer her support and improve your relationship with her. Speak to her discreetly and ensure neutral intervention.