



A REASON TO HOPE. THE MEANS TO COPE.
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UNE SOURCE D'ESPOIR, DE SOUTIEN ET D'ENTRAIDE.

Canada-Wide Survey Addresses Ways to Improve Quality of Life for Canadians Living with Mental Illness...

(Winnipeg, May 4, 2009) – Mental illness can be a devastating illness for anyone; however, it is especially difficult for young adults as it often disrupts their education, career plans and the raising of a young family. The symptoms of psychosis can confuse the mind, disorient perceptions, and unsettle important relationships with family and friends. But there is hope, schizophrenia and psychosis are treatable and recovery of quality of life is possible when people are able to find the right path to open up options for treatment, support and hope.

The Schizophrenia Society of Canada (SCC) recently commissioned a Canada-wide survey to learn how it can support people living with schizophrenia and their families to recover the best quality of life possible. Through a qualitative and quantitative survey and cross Canada focus groups, 1,086 people who have experienced mental illness shared what quality of life means to them. The results revealed that people living with schizophrenia and their families share similar hopes and frustrations regarding their quality of life.

This extensive survey, the largest of its kind in North America, highlighted certain key areas in which quality of life can be improved for people living with a mental illness:

Hope, optimism and a belief in recovery are critical to improving the quality of life for people affected by schizophrenia and related mental health disorders. While 96% of people living with mental illness believe recovery is possible, families sometimes lose optimism in the face of illness and don't always believe that professionals think recovery is possible.

Friendships and family support are foundational. Symptoms of psychosis can unsettle important relationships with family and friends and contribute to isolation and loneliness. The support of friends and family is essential to recovery, employment and greatly improves quality of life.

Stigma and discrimination are real barriers to quality of life. Approximately 90% of adults with serious mental illness are unemployed. Studies show that many of them want to work and many can work. However, the lack of rehabilitation programs and the prevalence of discrimination prevent them from finding meaningful employment. Poverty is the unfortunate outcome. Canadians living with mental illness also felt that treatment and support services are severely under funded.

Medications and services can foster recovery. While medications are important, most people feel their family and professionals place far too much focus on medication adherence and not enough on what supports recovery and builds their quality of life.

Family/caregivers need to find balance too. Families often carry a heavy burden, as a result the mental, emotions and physical health of the entire family can suffer. Having professional support, learning more about schizophrenia and understanding what supports recovery would help families cope.

Overall, the Schizophrenia Society of Canada's national survey recommends encouraging professionals to move beyond a narrow focus on managing symptoms to supporting and nurturing recovery from a body, mind and spirit perspective. Stigma and discrimination also need to be addressed through education, public policies and promotion of rights. As well, funding of safe, affordable, secure housing needs to become a priority as does meaningful employment.

Full study report and summary data are available on the SSC website at www.schizophrenia.ca.

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