



NEWS RELEASE

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Schizophrenia Society of Canada Announces New Resources in Addressing Mental Illness and Substance Use

Half of all people living with schizophrenia will experience a substance use disorder in their lifetime, creating a complex set of challenges for them, their families and the health professionals who treat them.

While gains are being made in the treatment of co-occurring schizophrenia and substance use problems, much of this information is not making its way to the community level, resulting in limited resources and information being available to individuals and families.

With the launch of the *Schizophrenia and Substance Use* initiative, the Schizophrenia Society of Canada is addressing the need for centralized, up-to-date, Canadian-based information and resources for service providers, consumers, family members and youth.

"We want to make families, service providers and people living with mental illness aware of the need for addressing substance use by those with a mental illness. Both the mental illness and substance use must be treated simultaneously as one impacts the others. Failure to do so results in delayed or failed recovery. These new materials and web site bring important attention to the relationship between mental illness and substance use," says Chris Summerville, Interim CEO of the Schizophrenia Society of Canada.

One of the first steps in the project, launched in September 2005, was to develop a pan-Canadian concurrent disorders panel, comprised of treatment professionals in the fields of mental health and addictions, administrators, researchers, and people with schizophrenia and their families. This panel provided leadership and direction throughout the project.

Dr. Stan Kutcher, Sun Life Chair in Adolescent Mental Health at Dalhousie University, and a member of the project's advisory panel, emphasizes that the information generated by the project will be helpful for many different groups, given that "problem substance use may be the rule rather than the exception for many people with mental illness, and in particular for young people struggling with the symptoms of psychosis. Effectively addressing that issue is necessary in order to enhance outcomes and to promote recovery".

During the first year of the project, six cross-Canada consultations were held which brought together individuals and family members affected by concurrent disorders, treatment professionals, researchers and administrators. The purpose of the consultations was to acquire expertise from the various sectors across the country and identify regional resources, service

delivery gaps, then recommend solutions to advance the issue of concurrent substance use disorder and schizophrenia.

The findings were used to develop a discussion paper which highlighted best practices, as well as the gaps and needs faced by family members, consumers and service providers from different regions across Canada.

In response to the need for public information, repeatedly emphasized during the consultations, SSC developed these public education materials that will be launched during Mental Health Week, May 5 – 9, 2008. In addition to making clear, accessible information available about schizophrenia and substance use to consumers and families, the website can also “act as a portal for ongoing information sharing and networking, and can provide a venue for posting information on emerging best practices and evidence-informed approaches”, comments Wayne Skinner, Deputy Clinical Director, Addictions Program, at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, and member of the project’s advisory panel.

To view and download the project materials, please refer to the website at www.schizophreniaandsubstanceuse.ca

About The Schizophrenia Society of Canada

The SSC, founded in 1979, is dedicated to improving the quality of life for those affected by schizophrenia and psychosis through education, support programs, public policy and research. The Society works with 10 provincial societies in a federation model to: raise awareness and educate the public in order to reduce stigma and discrimination; support families and individuals; advocate for legislative change; and support research through the SSC Foundation and other independent efforts.

For more information contact

Chris Summerville
1-905-415-2007
Chris@schizophrenia.ca