
A Google search for “schizophrenia” led me to the NIMH health topic web page on schizophrenia, which provides a variety of in-depth information on the basics of schizophrenia: definitions, explanation of symptoms and treatment options. The NIMH website also provides information for participating in clinical trials on schizophrenic symptoms and/or treatment. This is a unique feature of this website and I did not find any information about trial participation in an subsequent websites I visited.

This was one of the few websites I found that made mention of a continuum of symptoms and the variability in schizophrenic symptoms amongst sufferers. This website also seems to have some of the most thorough information I found and is from a very credible source (National Institute of Mental Health). I liked that there was a more positive component to the information provided: “In addition, it is important to understand that schizophrenia is a biological illness. Being respectful, supportive, and kind without tolerating dangerous or inappropriate behavior is the best way to approach people with this disorder.”

The NIMH also provides links to free books and booklets on schizophrenia. If I were working with a client diagnosed with schizophrenia or a family member or friend of someone with schizophrenia, this is one of the first places I would direct them to get credible, fact-based foundation information on schizophrenia.


Searching “schizophrenia” in Google also results in a link to The National Library of Medicine medical encyclopedia entry on schizophrenia. This site also presented very thorough and recently updated (2010) information on schizophrenia. The article was reviewed by doctors and psychiatrists. However, I didn’t get a “positive” feel from this website. The information presented is very factual and accurate from what I know of the DSM and what we learned in class but there was no mention of a continuum of symptoms or positive outlook for a person diagnosed with schizophrenia’s functioning.

If I were diagnosed with schizophrenia, suspected I may be suffering from schizophrenia or schizophrenic-like symptoms, or had a loved one diagnosed with schizophrenia, this website would provide me with a lot of facts but frankly I would be very scared after reading the entire article. Here’s a short excerpt:
Expectations (prognosis)

The outlook for a person with schizophrenia is difficult to predict. Most of the time, symptoms improve with medication. However, others may have difficulty functioning and are at risk for repeated episodes, especially during the early stages of the illness.

People with schizophrenia may need supported housing, job training, and other community support programs. People with the most severe forms of this disorder may not be able to live alone. Group homes or other long-term, structured places to live may be needed.

Symptoms will return if a person with schizophrenia does not take their medication.

Complications

Having schizophrenia increases your risk for:

- Developing a problem with alcohol or drugs: This is called a substance abuse problem. Using alcohol or other drugs increases the chances your symptoms will return.

- Physical illness: People with schizophrenia may become physically sick, because of an inactive lifestyle and side effects from medication. A physical illness may not be detected because of poor access to medical care and difficulties talking to health care providers.

- Suicide

This is very straightforward information but the kind that I would want to receive from a doctor or therapist so I could have someone to ask questions to and get some reassurance. I also found it a little strange that the writing style of the article switched back and forth between second-person (“Sometimes you may have many symptoms, and at other times you may only have a few.”) and third-person (“People with any type of schizophrenia may have difficulty keeping friends and working. They may also have problems with anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts or behaviors.”) Who is the intended audience of this article: those diagnosed with schizophrenia, family/friends, laypeople? It is difficult to tell based on the style in which the article is written and it also made the reading a little difficult to follow.


Next I Googled “Do I have schizophrenia?” in attempt to put myself in the mindset of someone who may be facing a diagnosis of schizophrenia and is looking for information on the Internet. This website provides a very rudimentary schizophrenia “screening” quiz. I took the quiz once, answered the questions honestly and received a score of 3. I took the quiz again and indicated I was experiencing some of the symptoms the quiz is obviously asking about and received a score of 13 with this explanation:
you may have some early signs commonly associated with schizophrenia or a schizophrenia-related disorder. Your responses are similar to others who experience early symptoms of schizophrenia or a schizophrenia-related disorder. This includes symptoms such as hallucinations and/or delusions, a poverty of speech, and/or emotional "flattening."

This explanation included a disclaimer that the quiz does not provide a diagnosis but that I simply answered in a way consistent with people those that have schizophrenia. The idea of an online schizophrenia “screen quiz” seemed kind of preposterous to me at first but I then realized that if a person suspects that he/she may be suffering from schizophrenic symptoms and visits a website for a “free screening,” he/she must already have some level of insight into symptoms and will hopefully soon seek help from a mental health professional. If the score on an Internet schizophrenia screening is what it takes for a person with schizophrenic symptoms to become convinced that he/she may need professional help than so be it. However, the information presented on this website also had a lack of positive or strengths-based view of schizophrenia.


After Googling “schizophrenia support” I located the schizophrenia.com website and spent some time reading through the discussion forums and found them absolutely fascinating albeit heartbreaking. The suffering of those diagnosed with schizophrenia and their loved ones could not have been any clearer after spending quite a bit of time on the discussion boards. There are risks inherent in using any chat room, discussion forum, blog, etc. on the Internet. These sites are not often regulated and are mostly user-ran. It is impossible to verify who is posting what information and the validity of the information being posted. However, the discussions that I read on the schizophrenia.com forums all seemed to be positive and supportive. Many of the messages seemed to be typed in a way consistent with how we’ve learned a person with schizophrenia thinks or communicates. Here is an example of a poster responding to a thread asking about a referral for mental health services in New Jersey after a user diagnosed with bipolar disordered realized his/her symptoms are more similar to schizophrenia-type symptoms (the user mentioned his/her physician agreed):

Hey cdk [original poster] ,this is joe .hope you are well,are exsperiences are so similar.I have been diagnosed with bpdtype 2 @ then later sc tendcies.,although a person dosent need a doctor to confirm that their differant from most people. find that good doctor,one who will listen to you .my thought life is so bizar i cant describe it to you.without great difficulty.Try writing down your cognitive and behavural symptoms the best you can to help yourself and to give to yout doctor.I hope thats not as hard for you as it is for me sometimes.dont know whatelse to say right now,its all swimming around in there,the fragments,if you know what i mean.I pray for the people on this site.many blessings,joe

Messages of this type are prevalent on the site. The universality in the suffering of those diagnosed with schizophrenia is evident throughout the posts. If I was suffering from schizophrenic-like symptoms or was diagnosed with a psychotic disorder, I personally would find this website very helpful. The anonymity of posting on a discussion board may help those suffering with schizophrenia to seek support that stigma may be preventing them from receiving otherwise. I would also find it
helpful if I were a family member, friend or loved one of someone diagnosed with schizophrenia because it allows one to read about schizophrenia symptoms and treatment from those diagnosed with the disorder and have some light shed on the mystery of the disease. As a counselor trainee I found a post titled “therapist makes me nervous” and another titled “In love with my therapist... is this normal?” extremely helpful even though it was very troubling to read about the concerns of so many diagnosed with schizophrenia in regards to his/her counselor or doctor and how often the clients don’t address these thoughts or feelings with the mental health professional.

Despite the lack of regulation on Internet discussion forums, I imagine this website would be very useful for someone diagnosed with schizophrenia, a friend or loved one of someone diagnosed, and for students in mental health simply wishing to get a “inside look” at the lives of those with schizophrenia.


Searching “What do I do if I have schizophrenia?” in Google led me to a link to Talk Therapy Television, a New York City-based television channel that airs programs about behavioral health. There are a number of videos and clips available on the website about different major psychiatric disorders: schizophrenia, depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety and addiction. There is a full-length episode available online featuring Dr. Fred Frese, a psychologist who was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia at age 25 after serving a tour of duty in the Marine Corps. and was eventually declared criminally insane. Dr. Frese speaks in detail about his early years after initially being diagnosed with schizophrenia, experiencing psychotic episodes, loss of employment, stigma surrounding the disorder and his eventual rise to become the director of psychology for 20 years at the largest state psychiatric hospital in Ohio.

After watching the video clip of the woman diagnosed with schizophrenia in class, it was fascinating to watch a clip of a person diagnosed with schizophrenia who very high functioning and not currently experiencing a psychotic episode. Dr. Frese and the woman in the clip from class are like polar opposites. The site and the network are ran by Jacob Berelowitz, a licensed master social worker in the state of New York. I think it could very informative and instill a lot of hope for a person diagnosed with schizophrenia, or their loved ones, to be able to access this website and view some of the video clips. However, viewers should maybe be warned that Dr. Frese is functioning at the higher level of the schizophrenia continuum and that all who suffer from schizophrenia may not be lucky enough to manage symptoms to this degree.