

Early *Intervention*

Early intervention of psychosis involves:

- Early detection and treatment of the first-episode of psychosis
- Sustained treatment during the “critical period”
- Early detection and treatment of any psychotic relapses

1. Early detection and treatment of the first-episode of psychosis

Numerous studies have shown that there is often a major delay in initiating treatment for people affected by a psychotic disorder.

These delays vary widely from person to person, but the interval between onset of psychotic symptoms and commencement of appropriate treatment is often *more than one year*.

A long duration of untreated psychosis before first treatment has been shown to involve significant distress, disruption and development of secondary problems for individuals and their relatives.

Some evidence shows that long delays in obtaining treatment may also cause the illness to become less responsive to treatment.

It has been found that delays in receiving treatment are associated with slower and less

complete recovery and that long duration of psychotic symptoms before treatment appears to contribute to poorer prognosis and a greater chance of early relapse.

2. Sustained treatment during the “critical period”

The ‘critical period’ is considered to be the first few years after the onset of psychosis.

It is during this time that social and personal disability is most likely to develop.

Depression, unemployment, homelessness, decreased social supports, drug abuse, and loss of self-esteem can develop aggressively during the critical period.

The longer these needs are not dealt with, the more difficult they are to treat or deal with.

By actively treating the psychosis and secondary problems during the first few years after onset of illness, better long-term outcomes can be achieved.

For this reason, early intervention is not just treating the first episode. It also consists of sustained treatment to prevent the development of disability and enhance quality of life.

3. Early detection and treatment of any psychotic relapses

Individuals experiencing a first episode of psychosis are at risk for relapse.

Through sustained treatment during the critical period, the risk of relapse will be reduced but not eliminated.

It is therefore necessary to be alert to any signs of impending relapse and intervene as early as possible to either prevent the relapse or reduce its severity.

By reducing the duration of untreated psychosis (both the initial episode and any relapses), the likelihood of good prognosis is increased.

Benefits of Early Intervention:

Some of the potential benefits of early intervention include:

- Reduced secondary problems and work/school disruption
- Retention of social skills and support
- Decreased need for hospitalization
- More rapid recovery and better prognosis
- Reduced family disruption and distress
- Less treatment resistance and lower risk of relapse