Schizophrenia/ Psychosis

A Serious and enduring mental illness characterized by “psychosis” (which means having a difficulty separating what is real experience from what is being generated by the brain e.g. hearing voices). The origins of schizophrenia are yet to be determined but it is likely to be a combination of genetic and biological vulnerability combined with stressful life events (stress-vulnerability) that play a role in development. There is also a theory that cannabis use in teenage years may be a contributing factor for some people (see module 3).

● Although people diagnosed with schizophrenia can present with a whole range of symptoms, it tends to be characterized by distortions of thinking, perceptions (seeing, hearing, touch etc) and feelings that are inappropriate or blunted.

● around a third of people with schizophrenia also have problems with substance use especially alcohol and cannabis. Many service users report that they like the effects of these drugs, but there is evidence to suggest they are likely to have worse symptoms and more relapses. Other reasons include access to a peer group, boredom and easy availability.

● Symptoms are divided into positive (those which are present) and negative (those which are absent) symptoms Not everyone will have all of these; for example, not everyone with schizophrenia hears voices.

● Positive symptoms (things that are present) include:
  – Odd or unusual beliefs that they hold with very strong conviction (used to known as “delusions”).
  – Strong convictions that some external force is controlling their thoughts and behaviour (delusion of control, influence) and may feel powerless over this.
  – auditory hallucinations (hearing voices, noises, music etc)
  – Thought insertion or withdrawal (someone or something is adding or removing, thought broadcast, and thought echo

● Negative symptoms (things that are absent) include:
  – being socially withdrawn,
  – lacking motivation to do things
  – not experiencing pleasure from anything

People diagnosed with schizophrenia can also have other mental health problems such as depression and anxiety, as well as personality disorders.

They may also develop problems with drugs and alcohol especially alcohol and cannabis.

Treatment is provided by mental health services and usually includes anti-psychotic medication, support, psychosocial interventions such as CBT and family work.