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Factsheet MH2 Types of mental illness Neurosis and Psychosis

There are different types of mental illness and some can have similar symptoms. Due to the uniqueness of human characteristics and behaviour people with the same diagnosis will have their own experience of mental illness and so can have different symptoms. Mental illness diagnoses are most accurately determined by identifying a collection of symptoms which may not be immediately obvious. Because of the complexity of doing this it is therefore important to rely on a doctor and ideally a psychiatrist to diagnose a mental illness.

Most conditions can be classed as either *neurotic* or *psychotic* and will be briefly described in this fact sheet. There are other conditions called *personality disorder*, *organic disorder* and *illness caused by the use of illicit drugs* and these will be described in fact sheet (3).

Neurosis

Neurotic conditions are the most common forms of mental illness. Symptoms can be confused with normal emotions but are different because they cause a more extreme reaction. Examples of neurotic illnesses are *depression* and *anxiety* – it is normal to experience these emotions to some degree in our lives but they become a mental illness when the problem becomes severe, escalating out of proportion and affecting normal activities. Other types of neurotic illness are *panic attacks* and *obsessive compulsive disorder* (OCD).

Common symptoms:

Depression: severe low mood, isolation, poor sleep and appetite, hopelessness, difficulties in concentrating and lack of energy. In its most severe form some people with this diagnosis may develop thoughts of suicide.

Anxiety: anxiety that is severe and persistent which can happen for no apparent reason or is triggered by some external stimulus including a phobia.

Panic attacks: linked to anxiety and phobias. The attack will cause a person to experience a sudden rush of intense fear frequently with feelings that they are going to die. Commonly people during an attack experience breathlessness, tremors, palpitations, sweating, light headedness and tingling in the fingers.

Obsessive compulsive disorder: obsessive thoughts that can not be ignored and are distressing or repetitive. They can cause the person to repeat behaviour in an attempt to relieve the anxiety and temporarily stop the thoughts.

Psychosis

Psychotic conditions are when a person forms a different interpretation of 'normal' experiences. It is the most serious type of mental illness. Examples of psychotic illness are: *schizophrenia*, *bipolar disorder (manic depression)* and *schizoaffective disorder*.

Common symptoms:

Schizophrenia: this is not a person who has a 'split personality' but means that they can find it difficult to determine what is real and not real. Their thoughts may be muddled and confused and they may appear very fearful. Symptoms vary from person to person and mental health workers will often classify them as 'positive' and 'negative' symptoms. Common 'positive' symptoms can be: disturbed thoughts; false beliefs that are very real to the person; unusual behaviour; or hallucinations. A hallucination is feeling, hearing, smelling or seeing something that others do not feel, hear, smell or see. By contrast 'negative' symptoms can mean that people with this diagnosis develop social isolation; poor personal hygiene; self neglect; difficulty in relating to others; poor motivation; and problems in coping with everyday activities. Unfortunately 'negative' symptoms can sometimes be made worse by side effects of the medication used to treat the 'positive' symptoms of schizophrenia.

Bipolar affective disorder also known as **manic depression**: a common illness that causes extreme mood swings from severe depression (see symptoms of depression) to manic episodes. Typical symptoms of mania are: inappropriate happiness; fast speaking and thinking; inability to sleep or rest, hallucinations; false beliefs; over activity; and behaviour that is promiscuous; disruptive; rash or uncharacteristic.

Schizoaffective disorder: an illness when a person experiences symptoms of both schizophrenia and bipolar affective disorder.

Where can I go for more information?

MIND (for comprehensive information on all mental illnesses) 15-19 Broadway London E15 4BQ Tel: 0845 766 0163 www.mind.org.uk

Making Space (a charity based in the north of the country who provide good online information) www.makingspace.co.uk

Depression Alliance 212 Spitfire Studios 63-71 Collier Street London N1 9BE Tel: 0845 1232320 www.depressionalliance.org

Royal College of Psychiatrists www.rcpsych.ac.uk

No Panic (info on panic attacks phobias, OCD and anxiety) Tel: 0808 808 0545 (10am-10pm) www.nopanic.org.uk