

Spotlight On Health

New Survey Uncovers Obstacles To Overall Healthcare For People With Schizophrenia

(NAPSA)—More than two million Americans live with schizophrenia, a chronic mental illness characterized by hallucinations, delusions and disorganized thought. It severely affects the lives of patients and countless family members and caregivers. Together, they face many challenges, from controlling symptoms and managing medication side effects to maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

New data show that people with serious mental illnesses—including schizophrenia—die at least 25 years earlier than the general population, mostly due to preventable medical conditions like diabetes, heart disease and infectious diseases.

There are many reasons for this alarming statistic. People with schizophrenia are three times more likely to smoke, are more likely to be overweight and more likely to be less active—all of which can contribute to diabetes, stroke and heart disease. Also, some schizophrenia medications can cause side effects that contribute to these problems. People with schizophrenia are also less likely to have access to a primary care doctor.

Mental Health America recently conducted a nationwide survey of psychiatrists and people with schizophrenia to determine what can be done. Results show that although both psychiatrists and people with schizophrenia are aware of ways to improve overall health, there are barriers preventing them from fully discussing such actions.

“We should be outraged that the lives of people with schizophrenia are being cut short,” said David Shern, Ph.D., president and



CEO of Mental Health America. “This survey tells us that mental health providers and people with schizophrenia must work together to lower smoking rates, control weight and manage medication side effects.”

While psychiatrists report discussing overall health with patients, they face challenges. For instance, 74% of psychiatrists feel they are not as prepared to address comprehensive health as primary care physicians.

Of people with schizophrenia, 82% feel that treatment of overall health is important to recovery. Yet nearly half expect their psychiatrist to focus only on mental health (48%), rather than their whole body health.

The survey also shows concerns about medication side effects. Sixty-nine percent of people with schizophrenia reported that they stopped taking medicine due to negative side effects and almost 40% reported that the longest they had remained on one medication was less than a year.

“For people with schizophrenia it’s important to regularly discuss health issues like diet, exercise and medication side effects with their doctor,” said Shern.

The independent, online survey was commissioned by Mental Health America and is the first national survey to examine comprehensive care from these two perspectives.

For more information, visit www.mentalhealthamerica.net.