

No Longer Defined By Their Illness, (T) More People With Schizophrenia Look Toward Recovery

(NAPSA)—There are many ways to describe Joe of Salt Lake City, Utah—he is 42 years old, a brother, a son, a friend, a student at the University of Utah and a person with schizophrenia.

Joe attributes his improved ability to function to better compliance with his treatment. Now able to manage his symptoms, he is working towards accomplishing goals he and his treatment team have set. He feels he has also reached the point where he no longer defines himself by his illness. In other words, Joe is not a “schizophrenic”—he is a person who lives with schizophrenia.

Joe and other people who are successfully living with schizophrenia exemplify the need for greater understanding about the mental illness that affects 2 million people in America—more than the combined populations of North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming—and yet still remains widely misunderstood by the general public. Schizophrenia Awareness Week (May 21-27) is an ideal time to start this understanding.

As stated by NARSAD, The Mental Health Research Association, “schizophrenia is a severe, chronic and generally disabling brain disease. While the term schizophrenia literally means ‘split mind,’ it should not be confused with a ‘split,’ or multiple, personality. It is more accurately described as a psychosis—a type of illness that causes severe mental disturbances that disrupt normal thoughts, speech and behavior. Schizophrenia is believed to be due to a combination of genetic and environmental factors.”

The severity of schizophrenia is

different in each person, and symptoms may vary over time. These symptoms may include delusions (false beliefs, such as insisting the government is spying on you), hallucinations (such as voices that command you to do something), disorganized thinking or speech (such as speaking without making sense or inventing words), agitation and decreased emotional expression.

A number of very effective medications called antipsychotics have been developed to treat these symptoms of schizophrenia. However, because people with schizophrenia often don’t believe they are sick—a condition known as poor insight—they resist taking medications. According to Dr. Robert Conley, a professor of psychiatry at the University of Maryland School of Medicine, having an option that takes the daily focus off the need to take medication can help move patients toward recovery. “For example, we are seeing significant success with long-acting injectable medications that allow patients to think less about taking their medication and more about how they define themselves outside their illness and the goals they have for returning to their families, their jobs and their communities,” says Conley.

According to NARSAD, with appropriate treatment, symptoms can usually be controlled, and most people with schizophrenia can lead productive and fulfilling lives. Treatment is believed to be most effective when begun early in the course of the illness. For more information, log on to www.narsad.org.