

# HEALTH AWARENESS

## Recognizing The Signs And Symptoms Of Schizophrenia And Seeking Support

(NAPSA)—Imagine that during the hopeful and exciting period of your life as you enter young adulthood, you begin seeing things that are not really there, behaving strangely without control and having problems speaking clearly. These are some symptoms of schizophrenia, a chronic and disabling brain disorder that affects about 2.5 million American adults and usually occurs between the late teens and mid-30s.

Meet Rebecca Roma, M.D., medical director, Community Treatment Team at Mercy Behavioral Health in Pittsburgh, Pa., and Rebecca P., an individual who was diagnosed with schizophrenia during college. Together they discuss the signs and symptoms of the condition, where to seek help and how to start on the path toward recovery.

How does one recognize the signs of schizophrenia?

**Dr. Roma:** Schizophrenia may occur abruptly and manifest as social withdrawal, deterioration in daily personal care, unusual behavior, outbursts of anger, paranoia, hallucinations or delusions.

**Rebecca:** When I was 17, I started becoming more introspective, felt sad and became paranoid. By college, I thought people were coming after me. I was unable to turn off unwanted thoughts, making me unmotivated, suspicious and scared.

What can you do if you suspect you or a loved one may have schizophrenia?

**Dr. Roma:** First, it is important to talk to your doctor and get educated. There are also local organizations, such as the National Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health America, that offer support for both individuals with mental illness and their family members/caregivers.



**With support and treatment, schizophrenia can be managed and people living with the illness can lead meaningful lives.**

**Rebecca:** When I first experienced symptoms, I withdrew from family and did not talk about what was going on with me. But over time, I realized my mom was my strongest source of support. She communicates with my treatment team and attends classes with me at our community mental health center.

In your experience, is recovery possible for someone with schizophrenia?

**Dr. Roma:** Mental health recovery is an ongoing process, not one single outcome. The experience can vary widely from one person to the next. That's why recovery plans are individualized and tailored toward each person's unique needs.

That said, I know individuals with schizophrenia who are living independently and keep steady jobs and others who are living with family, helping with chores and contributing to the household income.

Once diagnosed and on treatment, I recommend that individuals sit down with their treatment

team and loved ones to create an action plan for achieving goals.

Medication, including oral and injectable treatments, is the mainstay of treating schizophrenia symptoms. Long-acting injectable antipsychotic therapies (LATs), which are administered every few weeks to a month depending on the medication, offer patients a choice of how often to take their medication and may help eliminate one less pill a day for their schizophrenia.

There are resources available for those affected by schizophrenia, including support groups, peer-to-peer programs and informational websites, such as [www.TreatOnceMonthly.com](http://www.TreatOnceMonthly.com).

**Rebecca:** With support and treatment, I have redirected my focus from managing my disease to living life. I now take a long-acting medication and am no longer worried about remembering to take my medication every day, although I do still have to remember to go to my medication appointments.

To others struggling with schizophrenia I would say, know you are not alone and there is hope.

Learn more about treatment options for schizophrenia at [www.TreatOnceMonthly.com](http://www.TreatOnceMonthly.com).

[TreatOnceMonthly.com](http://TreatOnceMonthly.com) provides resources for individuals living with schizophrenia to help them understand treatment options and choose a medication that is right for them with the help of a healthcare professional. Visit the site to watch patient videos, access a doctor's visit guide and learn more about different types of long-acting treatment.

*Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Inc., provided the content for this article.*