

Asking Questions, Questions to Ask: Preparing and Meeting with your Mental Health Care Professionals

The following are some things to consider when dealing effectively with your care providers in the health care and community support system. There are also some sample questions you may find useful in organizing your thoughts for meetings with health care professionals.

Getting Satisfactory Results

You need to know some things to cope well with your mental illness. Following a crisis, family and other supporters can play an important role in helping you as you may be overwhelmed with dealing with feelings and thoughts. You may be on medication and your body may be learning to adjust to its effects.

Keeping Track of Information

- Try to keep a record of everything. Don't rely on your memory – nothing is unimportant! Make copies of everything you mail.
- List names, addresses and phone numbers.
- Start making notes and keep them in one place for reference - the ability to be precise about dates and time of incidents and developments can come in handy.
- Stick to the facts. Be concise and don't make conclusions. Try to describe what you observe objectively.

Care Providers

- Most professionals want to do a good job and help you recover.
- Staff who work with people with mental illnesses sometimes have heavy caseloads. Knowing this can help you maintain some perspective on what to reasonably expect.
- Learn about the different roles that your health care providers have in the process of your recovery.

To Obtain Positive Results From Meetings

- Be on time for appointments. Be polite. Keep all conversations to the point. Ask for specific information.
- Get the name of the primary mental health worker – the person who knows the most about your situation. Arrange an appointment with this person. You can request that the psychiatrist or physician in charge also attend.
- Help keep meetings short. Have your questions written down before the interview. Keep your questions simple.
- Ask to participate in the development of your treatment plan. During meetings, ask to review it.
- It may be helpful to keep an ongoing written record of your discussions.
- Family members and supports should keep you informed of everything they plan to do.
- Write notes of appreciation or criticism when warranted.
- BE ASSERTIVE: As a patient, you are entitled to information, respect and courtesy.
- Ask staff for guidance on the best times to call.

- Ask for clarification in plain language if you are unsure of specific issues or technical terms, or if you think an answer is too vague.
- Don't attempt to intimidate others.
- Don't allow yourself to feel intimidated.

You Have a Right to Know

The following are some questions you may wish to ask about your treatment, recovery and journey:

About the Assessment

- What is an assessment? How long does it take?
- What tests will be done and why?
- Can I bring someone with me when I have an assessment?
- Who will make decisions about what happens next?

About The Diagnosis

- What illness do I have? What is its nature?
- If a diagnosis hasn't been made, what are the possibilities?

If A Diagnosis Has Been Made

- What signs and symptoms suggest this?
- What is the likely cause?
- Where can I go to get information about the illness?
- What treatment options are there? How will they be helpful?
- How can I get a second opinion?

About Care and Treatment

- What are the aims of the care and treatment?
- What will the plan for treatment be? How long will it take?
- Who will be involved in the treatment? Other specialists? How often will I see you?
- What will be the best evidence that I am responding to treatment?
- Are you currently treating other patients with this illness?
- What happens if I refuse treatment?

The Family, Supporters, and Treatment

- Will my family be routinely involved in discussions about my treatment?
- What can they do to help?
- Are there any local self-help and family support groups?

The Treatment Team

- Who are my team and what will they do?
- Who will my key worker be?
- How do I get in touch with the Psychiatrist?
- Who do my family/supporters, contact if they are worried?
- Who do I contact in an emergency?

Medication

- What medication will be used?
- What are the expected outcomes?
- What are the possible side effects?
- What signs might mean the dosage needs changing or the side effects are too much?
- Are there any other medications that might also be appropriate?
- What substances are to be avoided when I am taking these medications?
- What will happen if I stop taking the medication?

Tertiary Care/ Riverview

- What is tertiary care?
- Why can't I be treated in this hospital to get special care?
- If my loved one is away at a tertiary care facility, how will I know how they are doing and when he or she is discharged?

Hospital Admission

- What hospital/ward will I go into?
- How long am I likely to stay?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of hospital treatment?
- Are there other options?

Discharge Planning

- What arrangements will be made for my care after I leave hospital?
- How do I get help from the Mental Health Centre? (community mental health services)
- Who will take care of my mental health needs after I leave?
- What if I have a crisis or am worried – who should I call?