



FINDING HOPE

Delay causes needless suffering.

It is estimated that on average a person with a mood disorder will see 3 to 4 doctors and spend over 8 years suffering bouts of illness before they receive a correct diagnosis and appropriate treatment. This delay results in needless suffering, lost productivity, and disrupted lives. Early diagnosis, proper treatment, and finding the right combination of support and medication is important to lessen the painful and disruptive effects of the disorder on the individual and their family.

According to a recent study by Statistics Canada (Canadian Community Health Survey: Mental health and well-being released Sept. 2003) depression, addiction and anxiety afflict almost as many people as heart disease or diabetes, but most sufferers never get help.

The study, based on face-to-face interviews with 37,000 Canadians, found that more than 2.6 million Canadians suffered from mental illness or dependence on drugs or alcohol during the past year. Mood and anxiety disorders were more common for women, while men were more likely to turn to alcohol and drugs. The data also revealed that the prevalence of mental-health disorders is highest among young people. Among those 18 to 25, more than 26% had mental-health problems or dependencies during the past year, compared to 15% in the 25-to-44 age group.

Young Canadians were also the least likely to get help. Only one in four said they had turned to a health-care professional, religious adviser, group support or a telephone helpline during the year before the survey.

Only a third of those suffering from these conditions received professional help. The Statscan survey also revealed that only a third of people with symptoms seeks help. Many are too afraid of what family, employers or friends will think, some are determined to tough it out alone, while others simply don't know where to turn.



Many who do look for help begin by seeking treatment from their family doctor. Fewer people sought the assistance of psychiatrists, medical specialists, psychologists, and nurses or social workers. According to the stats can survey, in addition to professional consultations, other methods used by Canadians who suffered from mental disorders or substance dependencies included: self-help groups, telephone hot line and Internet support group.

Most people who sought help were very satisfied with the care received. The vast majority of those who did seek assistance were satisfied with help received for mental health and or drug or alcohol problems. Over 82% reported being satisfied or very satisfied with the treatments and services received by the health professional consulted.

FINDING HELP

Perhaps the greatest challenge in coping with a mood or anxiety disorder is finding the right kind of treatment and support to meet your needs. We know from experience just how frustrating and confusing it is to find help. The good news is that with psychiatric treatment over 80% of people experience a full and complete recovery and they are able to return to work and play with minimum disruption.

The following information builds on the experience of people who have had a mood and anxiety disorder and is provided to help you think about and find the resources you need within your community.

As you begin to look for help, keep these points in mind:

- You have a right to receive quality care.
- You deserve the best care possible.
- Finding the right treatment is a trial and error process.
- Accessing services can be very challenging.
- Be prepared to do some research.

DIAGNOSIS IS IMPORTANT

Start by seeing your family physician to get an appropriate diagnosis and rule out other health concerns. It may be that your depression, anxiety and/ or mania is a primary medical condition. On the other hand, it may be caused by another underlying condition such as:

- A medical illness such as heart disease, anaemia, or thyroid disease.
- A side effect of over the counter or prescription medications you may be taking.
- Drug or alcohol abuse.

We also know that stressful life events such as a recent job loss, separation or death and/or a history of trauma or abuse can play a contributing role in your illness. Finding support to deal with these issues is also very important.



SEE A DOCTOR

The vast majority of people receive excellent care through their family doctor. Some family physicians are also trained in psychotherapy. When it is needed, the doctor can play a vital role in linking you to specialized services.

Unfortunately, we also know that sometimes the diagnosis of mood or anxiety disorders is missed. Feelings of sadness, anxiety, or irritability may be attributed to current life events, personality or a stage of development - like adolescence. Shame and fear of being 'labelled' may make you reluctant to be open about how you are feeling. Help your doctor by sharing what is going on. Make a list of your symptoms. Ask someone you trust to help you with this task as they may have seen changes in your health as well. Bring this information with you to the doctor's office so that they can sort through what is going on. Be sure to tell the doctor about all prescription and non-prescription

medications you may be taking including herbal or alternative remedies.

TREATMENT CAN BE TRIAL AND ERROR

Even with an accurate diagnosis, for many people finding an effective treatment that they can tolerate is not an easy task. If you are like most people, you may need to try more than one type of medication before you find what works for you. This can be very frustrating - but do not give up. There are many new types of medications and finding the right one can sometimes be a trial and error process. Talk openly with your doctor if you believe you need more or different support than you are currently receiving.

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SEEING A PSYCHIATRIST

Some psychiatrists specialize in diagnosing and treating depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorders. They can be very helpful when first-line treatment is not working or the side effects make continuing treatment seem impossible. Psychiatrists are medical doctors with specialized education and training in understanding and treating psychiatric disorders.

You will most likely need a referral from your family doctor to see a psychiatrist. Unfortunately, waiting lists to see a psychiatrist can be lengthy. Many people have a false idea of what a psychiatrist will do. A psychiatrist may see you only for a brief consultation providing your family physician with recommendations for ongoing treatment. Others may provide psychotherapy, cognitive or behavioural therapy depending on their area of speciality. To avoid frustration and disappointment ask questions to make sure that your expectations are in line with the services the psychiatrist offers.

Psychiatrists are often affiliated with a general hospital, which may also be helpful should your illness ever require a hospital admission for treatment.

Many regions of the country have very limited access to psychiatrists. In less populated areas, hospitals may have access to visiting psychiatrists.

Videoconferencing is an approach being used in remote parts of the country to bring specialized care to under-served areas.

PSYCHOTHERAPY CAN HELP WITH RECOVERY AND REDUCE THE RISK OF RELAPSE

Research supports the important role that psychotherapy can play in treatment. There are a number of different approaches used by therapists but the most common and effective approaches include:

- Interpersonal psychotherapy to help you navigate relationships more effectively.
- Cognitive and behavioural therapy and
- Family therapy to assist families cope when the level of stress is high.

Psychotherapy provides a safe, supportive place to talk about what is going on in your day-to-day life or deal with experiences of loss, trauma or abuse. The focus may be on your thoughts and beliefs, your relationships or on your behavior, how it is affecting you, and what you can do differently. Psychotherapy is usually brief and often has a time limit, such as eight to 20 visits. Psychotherapists come from a variety of professional backgrounds. Anyone can call himself or herself a psychotherapist so it is important to explore their level of training and experience.

Choosing a therapist that is a good fit for you will require reflection and research on your part. People take more time to buy a car than to find the right therapist or doctor. Take time to become an informed consumer. It is OK to ask questions to ensure a good fit. It is OK to change your doctor or therapist if you do not feel it is helping. It is OK to ask for a second opinion.

WHAT CAN I DO IF I AM NOT GETTING BETTER?

Sometimes efforts at treatment do not result in changes you desire. Alternatively, you may feel that you do not have a good working partnership with your doctor/therapist. Try talking about what

you are feeling to see if a change is possible. It is OK to ask for a second opinion, or to seek out a new therapist if you feel treatment is not working. However, because finding help can be difficult it may be advisable to find a new therapist before ending your relationship with your current care provider. For some people, their illness has had a more global impact on their lives. They may need help to deal with problems beyond their medical condition related to the social, economic, academic or employment impact of their illness. This may require more than one helping relationship.

DO I HAVE TO PAY FOR CARE?

Under the Canada Health Act, medical care is universally available free of charge to eligible residents. However, the services of most psychologists and psychotherapists are delivered on a fee-for-service basis, usually on a sliding-fee. Psychotherapy may also be accessed, free of charge, through a community health centre or hospital. If you have private health insurance, or access to an Employee Assistance Program, psychotherapy may be funded on a time-limited basis. Some family physicians have specialized psychotherapy training and their services are covered under provincial health plans. Social workers, nurses, and occupational therapists may also be available free of charge when their services are offered through government funded hospitals, clinics or agencies. These professionals can help you deal with problems related to relationships, finances (such as disability pensions), employment, education, housing and help you build a supportive social network.

LISTEN TO THE EXPERIENCE OF OTHERS

Self help and peer support groups can serve a valuable role in finding out about supports and services in your community. Through the support groups, you can ask for recommendations based on what others have found helpful. There is something quite powerful in hearing about how others have overcome the challenges you are facing. It helps to 'normalize' what you are going through and give you hope. The stigma associated with mental illness causes many people to keep

their illness a secret. In self help groups you can speak freely about your illness without fear of being judged. You can also help others by sharing what you have learned as well.

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FINDING RESOURCES

Be prepared to do some research. Mental health services are not well advertised and the 'system' of support can be very confusing. Mental health is a provincial responsibility, SO, where possible, a link to the government web sites has been provided which describe the mental health service system. Some other suggestions for finding help include:

- Contact the Community Information Centres in your neighbourhood
- Attend a mood/ anxiety self help group
- Call the local Canadian Mental Health Associations
- Check your yellow pages under:
 - o Community Information Centres
 - o Social Services Organizations
 - o Community Mental Health Clinics
 - o Family Service Centres
- Call the College of Physicians and Surgeons for referrals to physicians by specialty
- Contact your local hospital and see if there is a Department of Psychiatry
- Call a Help Line for information