

Fostering a *Dialogue* for Recovery



Discussing medication-related side-effects with your patient

Newer medications, psychosocial rehabilitation, family and peer support and integrated services have enabled a new level of

functioning for people with mental illness. For many individuals, a key element that enhances their progress has been productive, two-way communication with their doctors or a *Dialogue for Recovery*.

One important focus of this dialogue is the role of medications in patients' recovery, and of the complicating factor of medication-related side-effects.

Though some side-effects may seem minor compared to the symptoms of a serious mental illness, patients may be bothered by these complications, and as a result, may choose to alter or discontinue their medication regimens.

One way to help patients adhere to treatment is to build a *Dialogue for Recovery* about medication-related side-effects. Here are some ways to approach this dialogue:

- **Discuss pros and cons of medications.** By discussing the beneficial and adverse effects of medications during visits, you can better prepare patients for any treatment challenges that may arise and foster a stronger doctor-patient relationship. Improved adherence to medication regimens can contribute to remission, quality of recovery, and fewer relapses and hospitalizations.
- **Screen for distressing side-effects.** Antipsychotic medications can produce side-effects that hinder your patients' abilities to collaborate with you and stick with treatment. Enhancing your patients' comfort in discussing their concerns about side-effects will increase their trust and willingness to participate fully in treatment.

- **Consider using the Antipsychotic Side-effects Checklist (ASC).** ASC is a new, user-friendly screening tool designed to improve communication between doctors and patients about the treatment of mental illness. ASC serves as a "checklist" of common and distressing side-effects associated with antipsychotic medications. The checklist can help you, members of a care team and your patients maintain a flow of information that can strengthen communication and collaboration. This may be helpful during titration or when deciding to change medications.

ASC is designed to be flexible. One approach to using ASC is to have patients complete it with their caseworker. You can then review the checklist with your patients during their next session. You can also complete ASC with your patients during an appointment by having an open dialogue with them about side-effects. Either way, ASC can help you screen for distressing side-effects that your patients are experiencing. ASC may also encourage your patients to talk about *Dialogue for Recovery* topics, such as sexual dysfunction, and to track their health between visits.

ASC was developed by a medical steering committee led by Peter Weiden, M.D., SUNY Health Science Center, Brooklyn, N.Y., and Alexander Miller, M.D., University of Texas Health Science Center, San Antonio, Texas.

- **Display patient education materials in your waiting room.** You may want to have the patient brochure, *Building a Dialogue for Recovery With Your Doctor*, displayed in your waiting room along with ASC and other materials in the NMHA *Dialogue for Recovery* toolkit. Additional NMHA handouts such as *Giving Support to Someone Close to You* will help your patients and their family members understand the importance of open communication.
- **Address life goals with your patients.** Talk with your patients about other support mechanisms that are helping them recover from mental illness. How are their relationships going? Are they satisfied with their job situation? Are they satisfied with their housing? Physicians and other healthcare providers can help patients with severe mental illness realize that recovery is possible, and that despite their illness they can set and reach life goals.



For more information or to obtain additional *Dialogue for Recovery* materials, please contact your local Mental Health Association, or

National Mental Health Association
1021 Prince Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

800-969-NMHA (6642)
www.nmha.org



ASC and the National Mental Health Association *Dialogue for Recovery* program are supported by unrestricted educational grants from AstraZeneca 