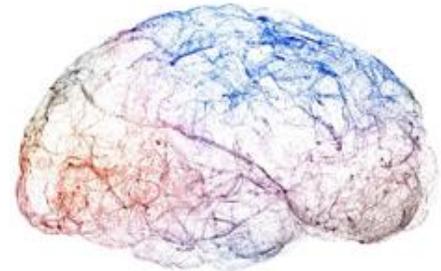


New treatment option for schizophrenia – Reagila® (cariprazine) – to be listed on PBS

View vision here:

<https://vimeo.com/592544606/d1188a8813>



Professor Ian Hickie AM

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What is schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia is one of the most severe psychiatric illnesses, one of the so-called psychotic disorders. A condition where people's brain function changes in such a way that they misperceive many things around them - hear voices, see things, misunderstand signals from others - and have a great deal of trouble coping with normal social interactions and getting on with their normal, productive life.

Who is at risk of developing schizophrenia?

We know that some people are at more risk of schizophrenia than others. Sometimes it runs in families, some people who've had brain injuries, or had particular infections during childhood, and certainly some people who have certain drug exposures during their adolescent and young adult years.

How many people are currently living with schizophrenia?

In Australia, there's approximately 90,000 people currently living with schizophrenia and a number much bigger than that who have other forms of psychotic illness.

What are the symptoms of schizophrenia, including positive, negative and cognitive symptoms?

When we discuss an illness like schizophrenia, we have ways of talking about the different experiences that people have. So we use terminologies like positive symptoms. That's like hearing voices that aren't really there, or seeing things that are not really present, or actually expressing ideas, paranoid ideas, conspiracy delusions, really active misunderstandings of the way the world is.

Other sets of symptoms are things called negative symptoms, and that's the lack of emotional expression, withdrawal, lack of activity, so things that actually are an absence of normal emotionality, and of actual normal behaviours.

A third set is that which affects cognition, that's memory, concentration, problem solving, and other higher cognitive abilities.

So unfortunately, when schizophrenia is severe and persistent, you may well see impairments in all three of those domains – positive symptoms, negative symptoms and cognitive impairment.

How does schizophrenia affect a person's quality of life?

Schizophrenia has a major impact on a person's quality of life, particularly when it's persistent, it's severe, and not responding to appropriate treatments. And that's because people with severe schizophrenia will find it hard to work. They'll find it hard to finish studies. They'll find it hard to form and maintain intimate relationships. They may well have great difficulty fitting in with their family and other key social groups.

Can you reflect on the physical, and often life-shortening health problems associated with schizophrenia?

People with schizophrenia on the whole, have about 15 years shorter life than the rest of us, and that's due not entirely to suicide and accidental death, but largely to increased rates of cardiovascular disease and diabetes, metabolic and cardiovascular complications resulting in premature death.

Why has schizophrenia historically been so stigmatised?

Historically, schizophrenia has been highly stigmatised. Now, in more recent times when treatments have become available, and when effective treatment is provided, then the degree of stigma goes down, because people can resume their normal lives, have jobs, recover from the illness, form intimate relationships.

What are some ways to reduce the stigma surrounding schizophrenia?

So a really important aspect of reducing stigma is the provision of effective treatments early in the course of illness, and to prevent the social isolation and social dislocation, which really drives stigma.

What is involved in the treatment of schizophrenia?

The treatment of schizophrenia consists not only of medicines, but of a whole lot of other social and psychological interventions, a combination of factors that help people to lead productive lives. One aspect is effective medicines. That needs to be combined with psychological interventions to help people live with the particular consequences of the illness, and social interventions, help people get work, hold jobs, have homes, maintain relationships.

The other really important factor is to provide the most effective treatment for that particular person with the least possible side-effects, early in the course of illness. Not to delay treatment, but to provide effective treatment as early as possible so that the impacts are markedly reduced.

Why is the development of new, effective and a broader range of treatments important for those living with schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia has been a long stigmatised and often ignored illness. The development of new and effective treatments, and a broader range of treatments, is really important. That's the way forward, so that people with schizophrenia can live more productive lives in the future.

Why is it important to ensure Australian adults living with schizophrenia have timely and affordable access to a range of treatment options?

What we've learned in Australia, and Australia's been a world leader in this area, is that early intervention for psychotic disorders like schizophrenia leads to the best possible outcomes. That early intervention needs to be the right combination of treatments, access to the best possible medicines, and that those medicines be affordable, and they be available. And in combination with that, access to the right kind of psychological and social support so that people could lead productive lives.

Why is the PBS listing of another treatment option for adults with schizophrenia important?

The PBS listing of another option for treatment of schizophrenia for the medical treatment is important in Australia. People with schizophrenia are not all the same. Different treatments will have different benefits and different side-effects.



Professor Suresh Sundram

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What is schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia is a brain disorder, which affects people, such that it causes problems with their emotions, their thinking. They might also experience other symptoms, which might interfere with their day-to-day functioning. These other symptoms can sometimes be quite distressing and disturbing. Symptoms such as hallucinations and delusions.

What is the age of onset for schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia is a disorder which begins in late adolescence or early adulthood usually. It's a disorder which, because it affects the brain, affects a whole range of brain functions, which people require for their normal day-to-day functioning and for their normal work, education, social activities. It's also a disorder which is lifelong.

Does schizophrenia affect women and men equally?

It affects men and women equally, but tends to have a different age of onset in the two sexes. So it tends to occur a bit earlier in men and a bit later in women.

What causes schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia is a brain disorder for which we don't know what the cause is. It's a disease which runs in some families. And it's also associated with other, uh, factors such as, for example, cannabis and other drugs of abuse.

How does schizophrenia affect a person's ability to live and function in the community?

The problem with schizophrenia is that it affects people's emotions. It affects their ability to think, and it affects their ability to be able to do a lot of the normal activities of daily living. Many people with schizophrenia struggle to find full-time employment. Many people with schizophrenia struggle to find a life partner or to have a sustained relationship. And many people with schizophrenia are in precarious or tentative housing or other financial situations, which impact upon their ability to engage with the community in which they live.

What is the average life expectancy of someone living with schizophrenia?

People with schizophrenia on average die between 12 to 15 years younger than their, than an equivalent person who doesn't have the disease. Some of these deaths are due to suicide, but in fact, the majority of these deaths are due to cardiovascular-related diseases.

How many people are currently living with schizophrenia?

The number of people with schizophrenia in the Australian community is probably in the order of about 90,000 people.

What is the cost to the community of schizophrenia?

It's been estimated to cost in the order of about \$6 billion per year. Uh, that involves both the direct health costs, but also the lost productivity costs. That is because people are unable to work, they are unable to generate income and revenue, they are unable to pay taxes. Uh, and in addition to all of that, of course, is the great cost of the carer burden. So, people who have to care for people with schizophrenia are themselves then, not able to engage as productively as they would otherwise.

What are the symptoms of schizophrenia, including positive, negative and cognitive symptoms?

Schizophrenia is a very difficult disorder to manage well and the reason for that is because we have all these different symptom domains. We have symptom domains, such as the positive symptoms of hallucinations and delusions. We have negative symptoms, such as the loss of emotion, the lack of speech, the inability to be motivated or- or to be able to get up and go. And we have the cognitive symptoms, such as the poor attention, the poor concentration, the impaired memory, the lack of flexibility in thinking.

All of these symptom dimensions impact upon a person's ability to live and function as they would like to, and therefore the management of schizophrenia involves targeted interventions for all of those symptom domains.

Why is there a stigma surrounding schizophrenia, and how does this stigma affect those living with the mental illness?

Schizophrenia has been reported, found in Australia to be the most stigmatised mental illness, and the reasons for it are relatively self-evident; because it's a disease which affects a person's ability to be able to relate to others.

People with schizophrenia, especially if they disclose their diagnosis, can be heavily stigmatised, and are heavily stigmatised within the community.

This has obvious implications for people's ability to find work for example, if they disclose that they have a diagnosis of schizophrenia, and similarly for them to be able to engage in relationships with other people who might well be frightened or fearful, because the person that they're talking to has disclosed to them that they've got a diagnosis of schizophrenia.

Why is it important to ensure Australian adults living with schizophrenia have timely and affordable access to a range of treatment options?

To be able to try and improve the day-to-day life of people with schizophrenia, we need to be able to intervene early. In other words, we need to ensure that they don't live with the sort of disabling symptoms that we know schizophrenia produces, and that we try and alleviate their suffering as soon as possible. In addition to that, we need to be able to maximise their functioning. We need to be able to give them treatments, which will optimise their ability to engage with the community and to engage with the sorts of activities that they find pleasurable and fulfilling. What this means is, we need a range of treatments, which are easily accessible to all Australians, because we also know that people with schizophrenia tend to be economically disadvantaged.

Why is the PBS listing of another treatment option for schizophrenia important?

It's essential for Australians living with schizophrenia to have timely access to all available treatments.

The PBS listing of another treatment option for schizophrenia is essential so that doctors and patients have the widest possible variety of agents to choose from, because we know that there are no perfect treatments for schizophrenia, and we need the availability of a wide choice of options to find the best one for any individual patient.

What is your message to the community regarding schizophrenia?

It's about time that we took schizophrenia out of the closet and recognised that it's a disease that many, many Australians are living with, and that we need to provide them with the same compassion and understanding that we do to most other illnesses and diseases.



Richard, 40

Mental health advocate & policy advisor living with schizophrenia, SYDNEY

How old were you when you were diagnosed with schizophrenia?

I was having a very good time at university, I was very active, I was very outgoing. And then the illness came along. And I think a combination of the impact of the illness, and the impact of diagnosis, and the impact of being in the clinic really changed me. I became much more introverted and much more careful, um, and my external hobbies retracted to some extent.

What symptoms were you experiencing and what made you seek medical help?

I had symptoms of irrational thoughts. I thought at one stage that one of my friends was the devil. Um, I felt like there were messages coming out of me from films and from television, like flashes. I would see people with violence having been done to them. And I had an overwhelming feeling like my mind was a little island of sanity in a sea of irrationality. And I had to fight to keep myself sane.

Can you reflect on your diagnosis with schizophrenia?

My diagnosis was by my GP, whom I still see now. And that was after a very long meeting where I described my symptoms to her. And then the next day, I went in with mum and dad and she said, "You've got schizophrenia. When I heard that, it felt like I was falling into a deep pit of darkness.

What is it like to live with schizophrenia?

It can involve fears that there are evil forces at play, that people are not what they seem to be, that people are playing tricks on you, or lying to you. So, the experience of schizophrenia is an isolating and a frightening one for many people.

Can you explain the stigma associated with schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia is a very stigmatised illness. It involves very often the belief that someone is irrational or violent or psychotic. When someone has been medicated, they can be thought of as zombies because their medication makes them slow down.

I've had very few stigmatised experiences and I always say, I dare the world to stigmatise me. But in those times when stigma has become an issue, it has been very hurtful.

How has living with schizophrenia affected your life?

I haven't been able to get full-time work. I can only work part-time. As a result of that, I don't have a big income, so I don't have enough to pay rent on an apartment. So I'm still living with mum and dad. And it's a bit sad when you're a 40-year-old living with your parents, but that's unavoidable.

What support system do you have in place to help you manage your schizophrenia?

I have a support system. I have my GP who I see regularly. I have a psychiatrist who I see once a month. And I see a homeopath, um, not for the medication so much, but more for the emotional support and the life support. And of course, I have my family, my parents and my brother.

What, in your perspective, are the main determinants of good mental health?

I deeply believe that two of the determinants of mental health are love and hope. Love because it is what encourages people and your family to support you, and it can help your self-esteem, can make you feel supported and important. And hope, because when things might be dark, you think that there might be a better day.

What is your message to other adults living with schizophrenia?

I would say to other adults with schizophrenia who aren't going so well, that it's important to take one day at a time, to take small steps, and to celebrate the small successes. I can't tell people to have love in their life, but it is important for the families of people with schizophrenia, to love that person, even though they may be ill.

What is your message to the Australian public about schizophrenia?

Don't be frightened of schizophrenia. Uh, it is a terrible illness, and it can make people experience really bad things. But it's also just an illness. And there are so many opportunities nowadays for people to live their lives, not just practically, and not just with a level of fulfillment, but with happiness.

ENDS

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