Evidence-Based Practice

Family Psychoeducation

What is Family Psychoeducation?

Family psychoeducation refers to a broad range of programs that provide education, support, and guidance to families about coping with mental illness. Education is provided about the nature of mental illness and its treatment; family are taught more effective problem solving and communication skills to cope with the challenges of mental illness; and support is offered through the group setting.

The family psychoeducation approach recognizes that mental illness is a brain disorder and that families play a significant role in their relative’s recovery.

A basic principle of family psychoeducation is that the best possible outcomes for consumers can be achieved through a collaboration among professionals, families, and consumers.

What are the Essential Elements of Family Psychoeducation?

Although the different family psychoeducation program vary considerable in their content, they all contain an educational component and a supportive/skill development component.

The educational component typically provides information on:
1. the different types of mental illnesses and the associated symptoms
2. the different treatments of mental illnesses, including information on medications
3. community resources and public benefit

The supportive/skill development component includes the following topics:
1. problem-solving skills to help families better manage their relative’s symptoms
2. communication skills
3. strategies to reduce caregiver stress

Family members are encouraged to learn from one another's experience and expand their social network.

What are the Benefits of Attending Family Psychoeducation?

Most of the research on family psychoeducation has investigated the benefits for consumers when family members attend a psychoeducation program. Many studies have shown that consumers seem to do better (e.g., have a lower risk of a psychiatric relapse) when families who have a high level of stress attend psychoeducation programs.

There is preliminary research evidence that family psychoeducation reduces family burden and increases feelings of empowerment.

Families who attend psychoeducation programs report high levels of satisfaction with the program and show an increase knowledge about mental illness and its treatment.

What are the Major Family Psychoeducation Programs?

There are several evidence-based models of psychoeducation that have been developed to address the needs of families of persons with mental illness.

• Behavioral family management
• Individual family psychoeducation
• Multifamily groups
• Family to Family

Behavioral Family Management

This is an individual family education approach done in the family member's home. The sessions focus on education about schizophrenia, strategies for improved communication, and the development of new problem-solving techniques. This model uses a strengths based approach, building on the family's strengths to help the consumer's recovery.

Individual Family Psychoeducation

This approach involves an intensive engagement effort with the family and consumer. Extended education about mental illness and its treatment, and guidelines for recovery. A key feature is working intensively with the family to solve problems raised by family members. The family receives education and support both in a group setting and in individual-in-home sessions. A hallmark of this approach is working long-term with the family to ensure the consumer's recovery.

Multifamily Groups

This approach builds upon behavioral family management and individual family psychoeducation. Initially each family is met with individually. However, after this initial phase, multifamily group meetings are held in which several members of the same family attend. The emphasis is on having families learn from one another, connecting families to one another, and building feelings of hope about the future.

Conclusions

The provision of family psychoeducation is an essential component of a recovery based mental health system.

Family psychoeducation facilitates a collaboration between mental health providers, consumers, and family members.

Family psychoeducation has many benefits for families. Research suggests that it reduces caregiver burden and increases feelings of empowerment. It provides an opportunity for families to expand their social network and feel less isolation. Families learn valuable problem solving and communication skills.

Family members who take the NAMI Family-to-Family course are better equipped to work with mental health clinicians in a collaborative manner. My bottom-line recommendation? Take this course. It will help you learn to cope successfully with a major challenge in your life, and that, in turn, will help your loved one as he or she works toward recovery. “Dr. Peter Weiden, author of Breakthroughs in Antipsychotic Medications.

References


http://www.nami.org

NAMI Family to Family

The NAMI Family-to-Family Education Program is a free, 12-week course for family caregivers of individuals with severe mental illness.

The course is taught by trained family members. The course covers current information about the major mental illnesses (e.g., schizophrenia, major depression, bipolar disorder) and their treatment, including medications, side effects and strategies for medication adherence. The program includes teaching problem-solving, listening, and communication skills, and strategies for handling crises and relapses.

Information is provided on supports and services to persons with mental illness.

A pilot study indicated that family to family reduced caregiver burden and increased the family’s feelings of empowerment. Family to Family has been offered hundreds of times in the US and participants overwhelming report very high levels of satisfaction with the program.

A NIMH funded study of Family to Family is currently underway.

To find out about Family to Family courses offered in your area, contact your local affiliate or the NAMI-Wisconsin office.