

PREVENTING SEVERE PSYCHIATRIC DISORDERS



The purpose of this information sheet is to facilitate your role in prevention and early intervention by providing information on the early warning signs, course of psychosis, and guidelines for making referrals.

It has been our consistent experience that pediatricians, family physicians, general practitioners and their office nursing staff are usually the professionals who identify the first signs early enough to allow us to prevent onset. Typically psychiatrists see these young people when psychotic illness is already well established, and prevention is impossible.

Please call us for a consultation (1-877-880-3377 or 662-2004) if your patient shows any combination of the following early warning signs and symptoms:

Changes in behavior, thoughts and emotions, such as:

- Feeling something's not quite right, without another explanation
- Heightened perceptual sensitivity to light, noise, touch, interpersonal distance
- Unusual perceptual experiences, fleeting apparitions, odd sounds, frank hallucinations
- Unusual fears and suspicions, avoidance of bodily harm, fear of assault (not social anxiety)
- Disorganized or digressive speech, jumbled thoughts and confusion, receptive and expressive aphasia
- Newly emerging, uncharacteristic, peculiar behavior or preoccupations, unpredictability, bizarre appearance
- Reduced emotional or social responsiveness, sadness, alogia, anergia, aphasia, memory difficulties
- Decreasing performance at school or work without another explanation or diagnosis
- Declining interest in people, activities and self-care

Some helpful questions to ask:

*"Have your eyes and ears been playing tricks on you recently?"*

*"Are you finding yourself withdrawing from friends, activities and hobbies?"*

*"Are sounds getting louder or lights seeming brighter?"*

*"Does it feel like it's harder to concentrate or to express yourself, harder to filter out irrelevant and distracting stimuli in your environment?"*

*"Are you feeling others may be staring at you or having hostile thoughts about you for no particular reason?"*

*"Does it feel like your thoughts or actions are being controlled by others at times or that you're getting messages from the environment that others may not perceive?"*

continued on back



## MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS

### PREVENTING SEVERE PSYCHIATRIC DISORDERS

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#### Introduction to PIER Program of Maine Medical Center

The mission of the Portland Identification and Early Referral (PIER) Program is to reduce the incidence of psychosis and reduce the secondary disability of those developing a psychotic illness through:

- Early identification of young people between ages 12 to 25 living in the Greater Portland area, who are at risk for or showing very early signs of psychosis.
- Development of a clinical service engaging and rapidly treating those identified as at risk, thereby offering the best chance for normal progress in school, work and in the development of social relationships. Early treatment is also avoiding the disabilities that are usually expected for established psychotic disorders.
- Ongoing research to determine whether a spectrum of psychosocial supports, in addition to close regular follow up and skilled pharmacologic management, can better protect young people at risk than the medication and regular follow up (supplemented by crisis visits when needed).

As with heart disease and cancer, treatment is generally most effective and benign in the earliest stages of illness. Delays in treatment are associated with a slower and less complete recovery. Although there is now sufficient knowledge and skill already available to provide excellent care across all the phases of illness, this may be possible without medication or with low doses of medication if the current delay between onset of symptoms and commencement of treatment is reduced. As many as one-half of all cases of psychotic disorders are being prevented, but this can only be done by early identification by primary care and pediatric physicians and educators. *In other words, you can help prevent mental illness in your patients.*

For more information about the PIER Program and the prevention of mental illness, visit **[www.preventmentalillness.org](http://www.preventmentalillness.org)**. Do not hesitate to call 1-877-880-3370 or 662-2004 to discuss patients, general questions or arrange for a brief training session for you, your colleagues, and staff. The PIER Program provides on-site education in early identification for CME credit.