

SOME COMMON TERMS

Acquired Brain Injury- Trauma sufficient to result in an anatomical brain abnormality. Acute management and long-term rehabilitation are vital after injury.

Addiction- Dependence on a chemical substance or activity to the extent that a physical or psychological need is established. The need appears as withdrawal symptoms when the substance is removed.

Agoraphobia- A common type of phobia associated with fear of public places or open spaces. People with Agoraphobia avoid being in situations from which they think escape difficult or where help and safety are not readily available. Often diagnosed in conjunction with panic disorder. See phobic disorder.

Alcoholism- Chronic disease with genetic, psychological, and environmental factors influencing its development and manifestations. The disease is often progressive and fatal. It is characterized by continuous or periodic impaired control over drinking; preoccupation with alcohol; use of alcohol despite adverse consequences; and distortions in thinking, most notably denial.

Alzheimer's Disease- A progressive, degenerative disease that attacks the brain, usually in older adults. The disease is characterized by a loss of mental abilities. Nearly four million Americans have Alzheimer's. The majority of people develop the disease after age 60, though a few show signs in their 50s. Signs include difficulty performing familiar tasks, time and place disorientation, loss of judgment, problems with abstract thinking, misplacing things, changes in mood for no apparent reason. Most people experience thoughtlessness or become disoriented, however a person with Alzheimer's experiences these symptoms much more frequently and to a higher degree.

Antisocial Personality Disorder- Type of personality disorder characterized by irresponsibility, inability to feel guilt or remorse for actions that harm others, frequent conflicts with people and social institutions, and low frustration tolerance.

Anxiety Disorders- A chronic or recurring state of tension, worry, fear, and uneasiness arising from unknown or unrecognized perceptions of danger or conflict. They are caused by a combination of biological and environmental factors. Anxiety disorders include phobias, panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder and post traumatic stress disorder. Treatable with bio-feedback, cognitive behavior therapy, and medication.

Anorexia Nervosa- An eating disorder characterized by an extended refusal to eat that leads to severe weight loss (loss of 15% or more of one's body weight), malnutrition, distorted body image, an exaggerated fear of becoming obese, and cessation of menstruation. See Bulimia Nervosa, Eating Disorder

Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)- Impulsive behavior, inattentiveness, excessive motor activity, and short attention span. In most cases it is the result of one or more factors, including anxiety, stress, physiological disorder, neurological disorder, and some organic mental disorder. Treatable with behavior modification and medication.

Autism- Condition caused by a physical disorder of the brain that appears during the first three years of life. Symptoms include disturbances in physical, social and language skills; abnormal responses to sensations, and abnormal ways of relating to people, objects, and events.

Bipolar Disorder- Also known as manic-depressive illness, major affective or mood disorder in which there are episodes of both mania and severe, disabling depression. Psychiatric researches believe it is caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain. Treatable with medication.

Borderline Personality Disorder- Type of personality disorder characterized by some of the following symptoms and traits: deeply ingrained and maladaptive patterns of relation to others, impulsive and unpredictable behavior that is often self-destructive, lack of control of anger, intense mood shifts, identity disturbance and inconsistent self-concept, manipulation of others, and chronic feelings of boredom and emptiness.

Bulimia Nervosa- Eating disorder characterized by excessive appetite with episodic eating binges sometimes followed by purging, through self-induced vomiting or abuse of laxatives, diet pills, or diuretics. Bulimia usually starts as a means of dieting.

Chemical Dependency- A state of being reliant upon a substance.

Co-occurring Disorder- Simultaneous existence of two or more diseases or dysfunctions, mental and/or physical, within an individual. Also known as dual diagnosis when there are two or more mental disorders occurring at the same time or when a mental disorder co-exists with a substance abuse diagnosis. Sometimes referred to as Comorbidity.

Compulsion- Insistent, repetitive and unwanted urge to perform an act as a means of relieving anxiety. However, the ritualistic behavior, such as repeated hand washing, is not related to realistically to what the person is trying to avoid.

Conduct Disorder- Repetitive and persistent pattern of child's behavior in which the rights of others are violated, as are age-appropriate norms and social rules. There are four types of conduct disorders: aggressive conduct, non-aggressive conduct, deceitfulness or theft, and serious violations of rules.

Dementia- Disorder in which there is loss or impairment of mental powers due to organic causes (physical disease) severe enough to interfere with work or social functioning. Memory disturbance is most prominent symptom. Other symptoms include personality change and impairment of abstract thinking, judgment and impulse control. May be progressive, static or even reversible, depending on particular conditions of the disease and its treatment.

Depression or Major Depression- An emotional and physical reaction characterized primarily by a depressed mood and loss of interest or pleasure. Other symptoms vary enormously from restlessness; to "empty mood"; discouragement; irritability; pessimism about the future; changes in weight or appetite; trouble concentrating, remembering or making decisions; fatigue or loss of energy; feelings of inadequacy, guilt, hopelessness or worthlessness; and physical symptoms that don't respond to treatment; and thoughts of death or suicide. These symptoms may go from very mild to very severe. To be diagnosed with clinical depression a person must be interviewed by a healthcare provider, and display at least five of the above symptoms, for a two week period or longer. To be diagnosed with dysthymia, a low-grade depression, a person must be interviewed by a healthcare provider and display two or three of the symptoms for two years or more.

Depressive Episode- Major depression disorder features one or more major depressive episodes, each of which lasts at least two weeks. Since these episodes are also characteristic of bipolar disorder, the term “major depression” refers to both major depressive disorder and the depression of bipolar disorder. When untreated, a major depressive episode may last, on average, about nine months. 80 to 90 percent of individuals will have another episode within two years of the first episode. Thereafter, at least 50 percent of depressions will recur, and after three or more episodes the odds of recurrence within three years increases to 70 to 80 percent if the patient has not had preventive treatment.

Disruptive Disorders- Such as oppositional defiant disorder and conduct disorder, are characterized by antisocial behavior and, as such, seem to be a collection of behaviors rather than a coherent pattern of mental dysfunction. These behaviors are also frequently found in children who suffer from attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Dual Diagnosis- The existence, at the same time, of both a substance abuse disorder and a mental illness. Can also describe the existence, at the same time, of a mental illness and a developmental disability.

Eating Disorders- Unhealthy patterns of eating and ingestion.

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS)- Various forms of damage to a fetus as a result of heavy maternal alcohol consumption. Potential problems include slow growth, mental retardation, and sometimes craniofacial and limb abnormalities.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder- Type of anxiety disorder characterized by motor tension, fear, worry, autonomic hyperactivity (sweating, dizziness, upset stomach), insomnia, and general impatience.

Grief- Emotional and physical reaction to loss of a loved one.

Incest- Sexual intercourse, cohabitation, or marriage between persons so closely related that marriage is legally or ritually forbidden.

Mental Health- The successful performance of mental function, resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationships with other people, and the ability to adapt to change and to cope with adversity; from early childhood until late life, mental health is the springboard of thinking and communication skills, learning, emotional growth, resilience, and self-esteem. (From Mental Health, A Report of the Surgeon General)

Mental Illness/Disorders- A mental illness, also referred to as a mental disorder, is a disease that causes mild to severe disturbances in thought, and/or mood and/or behavior, resulting in an inability to cope with life's ordinary demands and routines. Mental illnesses may be caused by a reaction to environmental or internal stresses, genetic factors, biochemical imbalances, or a combination of these. With proper care and treatment many individuals learn to cope or recover from a mental illness or emotional disorder. For others, it may be a lifelong challenge. Treatment may include medications, psychotherapy and/or support services.

There are more than 200 classified forms of mental illnesses. Some of the more common disorders are: depression, bipolar disorders, dementias, schizophrenia and anxiety disorders. The Surgeon General estimates that nearly 20% of the population has a diagnosable mental illness.

Mental Retardation- Refers to substance limitations in present functioning and is characterized by: a) below average intellectual functioning (IQ of 70 or below); b) limitations in two or more of the following areas: self direction, self care, home living, social skills, community use, communication, health and safety, function, academics, leisure, and work; and c) manifestation before age 18.

Mental Wellness- A feeling of happiness, peace of mind, enjoyment, and satisfaction in life. Our mental health affects our everyday life and physical well-being. It affects our work and the overall way that people get along – with their family, at school, on the job, at play, with their peers, and in their communities. It involves the way that each person balances his or her needs, ambition, abilities, ideals, feelings and conscience in order to meet the demands of everyday life.

Mood Disorders- A cluster of mental disorders affecting how one feels, best recognized by depression or mania. Mood disorders are outside the bounds of normal fluctuations from sadness to elation. They have potentially severe consequences for morbidity and mortality.

Multiple Personality- Type of dissociate state in which a person adopts two or more personalities. Dissociative disorders involve a sudden, temporary change in normally integrated functions of consciousness; identity, or motor behavior or loss of some part of one or more of these functions. This condition is very rare and is not a sign of schizophrenia.

Neurosis- A long-term disorder featuring the symptoms of anxiety and/or exaggerated behavior dedicated to avoiding anxious feelings; sufferers understand that the condition is abnormal.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)- Type of anxiety disorder in which the individual experiences unwanted, recurrent, and persistent ideas, thoughts, impulses or images (obsessions). Engagement in seemingly intentional behaviors that are performed repeatedly, and often ritualistically, as a reaction to conflict or other sources of anxiety.

Oppositional Defiant Disorder- Diagnosed when a child displays a persistent or consistent pattern of defiance, disobedience, and hostility toward various authority figures including parents, teachers, and other adults. It is characterized by such problem behaviors as persistent fighting and arguing, being touchy or easily annoyed, and deliberately annoying or being spiteful or vindictive to other people.

Organic Brain Disorders- Illnesses such as brain tumors, hardening of the arteries, and injuries to the head and brain may cause mental illness. Types of organic mental disorders include delirium and intoxication syndromes.

Panic Disorder- Anxiety disorder characterized by recurrent panic attacks or fear of having further panic attacks, and marked by episodes of immediate and intense anxiety at inappropriate times; palpitations, feelings of faintness, chest pains, and a sensation that death is imminent, even when there is no apparent threat or danger.

Pedophilia- Over a 6-month period, recurrent intense sexual urges or acts involving prepubescent children 13 years or younger.

Personality Disorders- Patterns of relating to and understanding others that are so maladaptive, inflexible, and deeply ingrained that they produce significant social impairment.

Phobic Disorder or Phobia- Type of anxiety disorder with a persistent and irrational fear of a specific object or situation resulting in serious attempts to avoid it.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)- Type of anxiety disorder that involves a reaction to experiencing an event that is outside the range of usual human experience. Examples would include accidents, natural disasters, assault, and rape. Reactions may include difficulty concentrating, showing no emotions, feeling jumpy, nightmares, having painful memories, to general emotional numbness, which often causes sufferers to withdraw from family and friends.

Psychosis- Symptom of a major mental disorder of organic or emotional origin, in which the personality is seriously disorganized, and contact with reality is usually impaired. The psychotic condition is often characterized by regressive behavior, inappropriate mood, diminished impulse control, delusions (thought disorder) or hallucinations (disorder of one of the senses).

Recovery- Refers to the process in which people are able to live, work, learn, and participate fully in their communities. For some individuals, recovery is the ability to live a fulfilling and productive life despite a disability. For others, recovery implies the reduction or complete remission of symptoms. Science has shown that having hope plays an integral role in an individual's recovery.

Schizophrenia- A psychosis that has lasted more than six months and whose active phase has begun before the subject is 45 years old. Features include thought disturbances, mood changes, communication problems, and behavior patterns that may be bizarre, regressive, or withdrawn. Psychotropic drugs, psychotherapy, and help with social functioning enable individuals with this disorder to live a fairly comfortable life. There are four subtypes of schizophrenia, which are: disorganized, catatonic, paranoid, and undifferentiated.

Social Phobia- Type of anxiety disorder that is characterized by an intense, continuous, and unreasonable fear of being observed or evaluated. Victims are most likely afraid of public speaking, performing before an audience, using public restrooms, or eating in restaurants.

Stigma- Refers to a cluster of negative attitudes and beliefs that motivate the general public to fear, reject, avoid, and discriminate against people with mental illnesses. Stigma is widespread in the United States and other Western nations. Stigma leads others to avoid living, socializing, or working with, renting to, or employing people with mental disorders – especially severe disorders, such as schizophrenia. It leads to low self-esteem, isolation, and hopelessness. It deters the public from seeking and wanting to pay for care. Responding to stigma, people with mental health problems internalize public attitudes and become so embarrassed or ashamed that they often conceal symptoms and fail to seek treatment.

Substance Abuse- Maladaptive pattern of using certain drugs, alcohol, medications, and toxins despite their adverse consequences. Over 40% of individuals with substance abuse issues have evidence of a mental disorder prior to using. This may be referred to as self-medicating.

Suicide- The act of intentionally killing oneself. The factors that contribute to any particular suicide are diverse and complex, so efforts to understand suicide must incorporate many approaches, including the clinical, neurobiological, legal and psychosocial aspects. Risk factors include suicidal thoughts; psychiatric disorders (such as depression, impulsive aggressive behavior, bipolar disorder, certain anxiety disorders); drug and/or alcohol abuse; social isolation; the presence of a physical illness; and previous suicide attempts. The risk is increased if there is situational stress and access to firearms.