What to do when you suspect that someone you know may have psychosis?

Because the hallucination and delusion they experience can be very real to them, people with psychosis are usually unaware that they are thinking and acting strangely. Thus, it is important for their friends and relatives to seek help for them.

If you are concerned about someone you know and think they may have psychosis, you could encourage them to seek help and if they agree, you can:

- Bring them to a general medical doctor for initial screening and referral to the psychiatric department in the Hospital Authority.
- Bring them to a private psychiatrist for assessment.
- Contact our University’s Counseling and Wellness Center, to make an appointment with our professional counselor for initial screening.

If you think the person’s symptoms are placing them at possible risk of harm (self-harm or harming others), you can:

- Take them to the nearest accident and emergency (A&E) department, if they agree.
- Call 999 and ask for an ambulance.

Treatment for Psychosis

- Antipsychotic medication - which can help relieve the symptoms
- Psychological interventions - individual Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and family intervention are proven to be useful treatments

Social and community support including support with educational, occupational or accommodation are very important for people with psychosis to adapt to community life after recovery.

Most people with psychosis, who get better with medication, need to continue taking it for at least a year. Some people need to take long term medication to prevent symptoms recurring.

The importance of early intervention

If left untreated, psychotic symptoms can lead to disruptions in school and work, strained family relations, and separation from friends. The longer the symptoms go untreated, the greater the risk of additional problems. The prognosis is generally better when people receive effective treatment as early as possible.

Local services for psychosis

In Hong Kong, the Hospital Authority established The E.A.S.Y. (Early Assessment Service for Young People with Early Psychosis) program, which is a one-stop service program for people (age 15-64) suffering from early psychosis. If you suspect that you, your family or people you know is suffering from psychosis, you can contact E.A.S.Y. program for direct referral through:

- Direct hotline 2928-3283

Acknowledgement: Reference from the National Institute of Mental Health, National Health Service & NICE Guidelines

Seeking Professional Help

The University provides counseling services for undergraduate and postgraduate students. You may check out our Counselors’ profiles on our webpage and make an appointment with them online. Two weeks’ advance booking is allowed. Please be reassured that all information shared and anything discussed during counseling sessions will be strictly confidential.

Counseling and Wellness Center

Room 5003 (via lift 3)  http://counsel.ust.hk
Email: counsel@ust.hk  Tel. (852) 2358-6696
24/7 HEARing: (852) 8208-2688
This is a helpline exclusively for all HKUST students. Counselors are from Christian Family Service Centre.

Psychosis is a mental health problem, which may involve hallucinations or delusions. It causes people to lose contact with reality.
Facts about Psychosis

• Psychosis often begins when a person is in their late teens to mid-twenties.
• Psychosis affects people from all walks of life.
• 3 out of 100 people will experience psychosis at some time in their lives.
• Psychosis can be a symptom of a mental illness, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or severe depression, but there are other causes as well.
• Psychosis can also be triggered by traumatic experiences, stress, or physical conditions, such as sleep deprivation, Parkinson’s disease, a brain tumor, or as a result of drug or alcohol abuse.
• Because there are many different causes of psychosis, it is important to see a qualified health care professional (e.g., psychologist or psychiatrist) in order to receive a thorough assessment and an accurate diagnosis.

What is Psychosis?

• During a period of psychosis, a person’s thoughts and perceptions are disturbed and the individual may have difficulty understanding what is real and what is not.
• Experiencing the symptoms of psychosis is often referred to as having a psychotic episode.
• Symptoms of psychosis include:
  o Delusions (believing in something that is not real even when presented with facts).
  o Hallucinations (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting or feeling something that is not real).
  o Other symptoms include incoherent or nonsense speech, and behavior that is inappropriate for the situation.
  o A person in a psychotic episode may also experience depression, anxiety, sleep problems, social withdrawal, lack of motivation and difficulty in overall functioning.
  o The combination of hallucinations and delusional thinking can often severely disrupt perception, thinking, emotion, and behavior.

What causes psychosis?

• There is no one specific cause of psychosis. Psychosis may be a symptom of a mental illness, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or severe depression, but there are other causes as well.
• Psychosis can also be triggered by traumatic experiences, stress, or physical conditions, such as sleep deprivation, Parkinson’s disease, a brain tumor, or as a result of drug or alcohol abuse.

What is the connection between psychosis and schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia is a mental illness characterized by periods of psychosis. An individual must experience psychotic symptoms for at least six months in order to be diagnosed with schizophrenia. However, a person may experience psychosis and never be diagnosed with schizophrenia, or any other mental health condition.

Early signs of psychosis

• Feeling confused. Difficulty telling reality from fantasy.
• Speaking strangely. Confused speech or trouble communicating.
• Acting oddly. Doing things a person would not usually do, or being wary or guarded.
• Having strange visual experiences: seeing things other people do not see.
• Having strange auditory experiences: hearing sounds that other people do not hear.
• Being suspicious, having paranoid ideas or feeling uneasy with others.
• Feeling depressed and/or anxious. Irritable or angry. Mood swings.
• Difficulty in thinking clearly or concentrating.
• Declining in self-care or personal hygiene.
• Socially withdrawn, spending more time alone than usual.
• Lacking motivation.
• Dropping in study or work performance.

Any one of these items by itself may not be significant, but someone with several items on the list should consult a mental health professional.

Early treatment of psychosis increases the chance of a successful recovery. If you notice these changes in behavior and they begin to intensify or do not go away, it is important to seek help.