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EPICENTER

Early Psychosis Intervention Center at UPH Hospital

EPICENTER is a new treatment and research program that provides specialized, phase-specific treatment for persons early in the course of a psychotic illness.

The center, one of a handful of its kind in the United States and the only one in Arizona, is located at University Physicians Hospital, 2800 E. Ajo Way, Tucson, Ariz.

Goals

The new center aims to shorten the period of untreated psychosis and reduce the impact of mental illness through early symptom alleviation and reintegration back into the community.

Director

Director of the program is Dr. Nicholas Breitborde. He is also an assistant professor of psychiatry in the Department of Psychiatry at The University of Arizona. Dr. Breitborde received his Ph.D. in psychology from the University of California, Los Angeles, and completed his clinical internship at the Yale University Training Program in Clinical and Community Psychology. Following the completion of his doctoral program, Dr. Breitborde served as project director for the Specialized Treatment Early in Psychosis Program at Yale University. His experience in that program served as the inspiration and basis for developing the EPICENTER.

Patients

EPICENTER is for people showing early signs of mental illness including schizophrenia, schizoaffective, bipolar disorder with psychotic features and unspecified psychosis. Signs of these illnesses include: trouble with reality testing, paranoia, hallucinations, delusions, disorganization, odd behavior or thinking, isolating, emotional changes, and difficulty with work or school.

Services

At EPICENTER, people have the opportunity to discuss their concerns, get practical support, and participate in research studies. Services include clinical evaluations & assessment, specialized, phase-specific care, cognitive behavioral group therapy, and family education and support. Intervention can also include multifamily group psychoeducation, a treatment rarely available to patients in the U.S.

EPICENTER now offers evidence-based treatment called cognitive remediation to address the problems in cognitive functioning that people with psychotic disorders tend to experience.

Benefit

The average time between the onset of psychotic symptoms and the receipt of adequate care is approximately 2 years in the U.S. But, as with physical illness, treatment as early as possible in the course of a mental illness, such as psychosis, can lead to better outcomes. The longer the illness is left untreated, the greater the disruption to the person's ability to meet the demands of everyday life.

Clinical Studies

The largest randomized controlled trial of first-episode psychosis completed to date* has shown that providing more intensive treatment early in the course of a psychotic illness appears to promote positive outcomes. People with first-episode psychosis who received an intensive treatment package (i.e., medication along with three psychosocial interventions) had fewer psychotic symptoms at two-year follow-up than individuals with first-episode psychosis who received traditional care. Individuals receiving the integrated treatment also experienced a reduction in substance abuse at two-year follow-up. Individuals who received this intensive treatment package were also more likely to be living independently three years after the completion of this treatment program than individual who received traditional care.

More information on the program is available by calling UPH Psychiatry Clinic at (520) 874-7500.

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* Bertelsen, M., Jeppesen, P., Petersen, L., Thorup, A., Øhlenschläger, J., le Quach, P., Christensen, T. O., Krarup, G., Jørgensen, P., & Nordentoft, M. (2008). Five-year follow-up of a randomized multicenter trial of intensive intervention vs standard treatment for patients with a first episode of psychotic illness: The OPUS study. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 65, 762-771.