

Schizoaffective Disorder - Information for Families

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Schizoaffective Disorder is a debilitating mental illness characterized by symptoms of a thought disorder (hallucinations and/or irrational thinking) and a mood disorder (depression or manic activity). This illness may present a variety of symptoms from each category, and symptoms may be mild or severe. For some general thoughts on dealing with a loved one's diagnosis of a mental illness such as schizoaffective disorder, please see our ["Mental Illness - Information for Families"](#) page. Schizoaffective Disorder may be difficult to treat, as the symptoms of the thought disorder are typically treated with different medications than the symptoms of depression or mania. Arriving at the proper balance of medication is often complex and may take time. This can be frustrating to the mentally ill person, as well as to the family and friends. If you have questions, feel free to talk to your psychiatrist about the medication regimen that is being used, and ask questions about how and why medications are being prescribed. In terms of treatment approaches, research to date suggests that the most effective treatment for schizoaffective disorder is a continuum of care model, which has a focus on Social Rehabilitation. The Social Rehabilitation Model is aimed at assisting the diagnosed client with learning the skills necessary to live an independent life style. This includes medication management, independent living skills, socialization and vocational and a variety of other support systems. Research suggests that a person recently diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder can best be treated and success achieved if allowed to participate in an environment in which counseling support and vocational services are offered on a 24-hour basis. It has been found to be most effective for people not to be hospitalized for too long but rather to move into a residential setting such as mentioned above. After this, we find moving into less and less restricted programs to be effective, whereby the diagnosed person eventually gets their own apartment or living arrangements and perhaps attends an outpatient program to assist with continued living skills. Many new and profound advances have been made in the past few decades in the treatment of schizoaffective disorder. New psychotropic medications are available, and they are more effective and have fewer side effects than previously available medications. Although far from a simple illness to treat, the prognosis for a person with schizoaffective disorder is better than it has ever been. **If your family member is out of control or suicidal (danger of harm to self or others), stay calm and call 911. Do not try to handle it alone.**