



Relapse prevention plan is important component

November 29, 2010

Evansville Courier and Press

Recovery in mental health is a topic that is getting increased attention. Recovery no longer is just for individuals who struggle with addictions. Individuals who are diagnosed with a mental illness now are thought to be able to recover from their illness. What "recovery" means will depend on each individual.

"Mental health recovery is a journey of healing and transformation enabling a person with a mental health problem to live a meaningful life in a community of his or her choice while striving to achieve his or her full potential," according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

One key element in helping an individual achieve his definition of recovery is to have a relapse prevention plan. Regardless of where the person is in his recovery, a relapse prevention plan is important. It is a mechanism for the individual and his support system to identify specifics of the person's illness.

Developing a plan provides a good opportunity for an individual to discuss with his support system specifics of his illness. For some, this may be the first time that they have talked to their support systems about their illness.

What should go into a relapse prevention plan? This will vary based on an individual's wants and needs. However, there are some key areas that need to be included in all plans.

One area to include is the individual's triggers — external events or circumstances that can cause an increase in a person's symptoms such as anxiety, depression, etc. It is important

that an individual recognize what his triggers are and how he may react to them in order to develop coping skills to better manage his reactions.

Another area to include in a relapse prevention plan is the individual's early warning signs. Early warning signs are subtle or sometimes obvious changes which may result in an increase in symptoms. This could include increased isolation, increased or decreased sleep or appetite, change in dress or attire, rate of speech or changes in behavior. This area is important to discuss with a support system because an individual often has difficulty recognizing and addressing early changes in his behavior. More often than not, it is others who recognize these changes.

An additional area to include in a relapse prevention plan is documenting what has helped an individual in the past when he was having an increase in symptoms. This would include coping skills and/or possibly people in their natural support system. When an individual is having an increase in symptoms, it is sometimes challenging to utilize coping skills. The relapse prevention plan can serve as a prompt to implement these skills.

The following are other areas that can be included in the plan: medications that are being taken, contact persons and what has not been helpful in the past. Most importantly, make the plan individualized to meet the needs of the person. Be sure to give a copy of the plan to people in your support system so they will be

familiar with information on the plan and can best be prepared to help when needed.

As always, if a situation arises that is more than you can handle, please seek the help of a professional. Local help is available to assist you in your time of need.

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