

# BEST PRACTICES IN SCHIZOPHRENIA TREATMENT (BeST) CENTER

*The mission of the Best Practices in Schizophrenia Treatment (BeST) Center is to promote recovery and improve the lives of as many people with schizophrenia as possible by accelerating the adoption of evidence-based and promising treatment practices. Research has shown that when individuals affected by schizophrenia receive a combination of psychological and psychosocial therapies and antipsychotic medications, they can and do make significant recoveries.*

*The BeST Center accomplishes its mission through strategic partnerships; expert training, consultation, and evaluation; national, state and local advocacy; and public awareness that inspires investment, commitment and capacity of organizations, systems of care and communities to provide and sustain a continuum of evidence-based and promising practices for schizophrenia treatment and recovery.*

## BeST CENTER PRACTICES

### FIRST Coordinated Specialty Care for First Episode Psychosis

Research suggests that the early identification and treatment of schizophrenia can alter the trajectory of the illness and lead to a faster, more complete recovery. FIRST is a comprehensive, integrated treatment approach for individuals who have had an initial episode of schizophrenia. Key components of FIRST include a multidisciplinary team, assertive outreach, shared decision-making, family education and support, psychiatric care, individual counseling, supported employment and education and case management. FIRST also includes public education to help communities recognize and respond to early symptoms of schizophrenia and ultimately decrease the duration of untreated psychosis.

### Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Psychosis (CBT-p)

At least 25-50 percent of the individuals affected by schizophrenia continue to have persistent psychotic symptoms, such as hearing voices, despite taking antipsychotic medications as prescribed. When treated with medication and a form of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy adapted for psychosis (CBT-p), individuals affected by persistent psychotic symptoms can experience improvements in symptoms and overall functioning. The BeST Center offers CBT-p interventions that individual practitioners and teams, such as first episode psychosis and Assertive Community Treatment teams, can incorporate into clinical care. The goal is to provide individuals affected by schizophrenia with tools and methods to help them cope and gain some control over persistent psychotic symptoms.

### Family Education and Support

There is substantial evidence indicating that when families and significant others of people affected by schizophrenia are provided with support and education about the illness, relapse rates are significantly lower, overall individual and family functioning improves, and family burdens are reduced. This BeST practice recognizes that families and significant others are vital members of the recovery team and benefit from education about serious mental illnesses; informational resources; strategies to prevent and manage crises; skills training and ongoing guidance about managing mental illnesses; problem-solving; and social and emotional support. The BeST Center recognizes the need for an array of family education and support options based on preferences, needs, cultural considerations and accessibility.

### Cognitive Remediation

Schizophrenia can affect cognition, memory, problem-solving and social adjustment and have a significant impact on an individual's family, social relationships and vocational aspirations. Cognitive Enhancement Therapy is an 18-month structured cognitive remediation program that addresses both neurocognition and social cognition through computer-based and social group activities that improve mental stamina, attention, memory, problem-solving and social interactions. In partnership with the University of Pittsburgh's research-based Cognitive Enhancement Therapy model (CET), the BeST Center is informing modifications to support CET implementation in community mental health settings.

## Pharmacotherapy for Schizophrenia

There are multiple schizophrenias, each with similar outward appearance, but different underlying pathophysiology. This has important implications for those with first-episode and multi-episode schizophrenia as well as those who have an adequate response to pharmacotherapy and those who fail to respond adequately to treatment. Individuals who respond to antipsychotic medication may be more successful over time if they receive their medication in the form of long-acting injections. Injectable medications are an under-utilized strategy. Usual antipsychotic medications may fail to achieve desirable outcomes because they miss the target pathophysiology. Individuals who fail to respond to the usual antipsychotic medications often do respond to a unique medication, clozapine. However, for a variety of reasons, clozapine is under-utilized. The BeST Center is providing educational and training activities to help clinicians and trainees from multiple disciplines build an awareness of and appreciation for multiple treatment approaches to multiple schizophrenias. The BeST Center intends to increase the appropriate use of long-acting injectable antipsychotic medications and clozapine. The use of szConsult Project ECHO, a videoconferencing educational and case consultation platform, is accelerating the rate and range of clinicians participating in this work.

## Integrated Primary and Mental Health Care

People with serious mental illnesses die significantly earlier than those who do not have mental illnesses. The causes of premature death are often preventable and treatable conditions, such as heart disease and diabetes. Providing integrated primary care, mental health and addictions treatment is a promising solution to improving the health and quality of life of people with chronic physical and psychiatric conditions. Whether providing primary care in community mental health centers or providing mental health and addiction care in primary care settings, the BeST Center offers a number of education and training initiatives to promote the delivery of integrated primary, mental health and/or addictions treatment.

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*Promoting Innovation. Restoring Lives.*

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