

State Government of Victoria, Australia, Department of Health: Victorian Mental Health Services

2015 factsheet: A Guide To Mental Health Terminology

A Guide To Mental Health Terminology

This guide aims to provide a quick reference for anybody seeking to understand terms commonly used by mental health services.

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Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)

A permanent brain injury that results in impairment to an individual's physical, cognitive (ability to think and reason), behavioural or emotional functioning. The injury may be caused by accident, infection, disease, overuse of alcohol, stroke, brain tumour or other medical illnesses. Acquired brain injury is not a mental illness and requires very different specialist skills from those offered by mental health services. However, people with acquired brain injury can also suffer from a mental illness.

Acute Mental Illness

Acute mental illness is characterised by significant and distressing symptoms of a mental illness requiring immediate treatment. This may be the person's first experience of mental illness, a repeat episode or the worsening of symptoms of an often continuing mental illness. The onset is sudden or rapid and the symptoms usually respond to treatment.

Acute Treatment

The intensive treatment provided to the person who is experiencing acute mental illness. Depending on the person's needs, acute treatment can be offered in the person's own environment or in a psychiatric inpatient service. Depending on the severity of symptoms, the distress involved for the person and the risk of harm to self or others, acute treatment may be provided in the community by a Crisis Assessment and Treatment (CAT) service, by a community mental health centre or in a psychiatric inpatient service.

Adolescent Mental Health Services

See Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

Adult Mental Health Services

The network of public mental health services providing assessment, treatment and support for people with severe mental illness or other severely disabling psychiatric disorders, aged 16-65 years of age. Services include community mental health centres, crisis assessment and treatment services, mobile support and treatment services, psychiatric inpatient services and non-government psychiatric disability support services.

Affective Disorder

See bi-polar affective/mood disorder.

Aged Persons' Mental Health Services

Specialist public mental health services for people with severe mental illness who are 65 years of age and over. Services include psychogeriatric assessment and treatment services and psychiatric inpatient services.

Agitation/Agitated

Restless, repeated activity arising from a person's anxiety or frustration. For example the person may be unable to stand or sit still and may be noticeably upset. It is important to note that a side effect of antipsychotic medication is physical restlessness, usually first noticed as shaking in the arms and legs, which can mimic agitated behaviour.

Alzheimer's Disease

A form of dementia characterised by the gradual deterioration of brain tissues and brain function. The effects progress from mild forgetfulness and confusion to a permanent inability to perform routine life tasks, for example making a cup of coffee or putting on one's clothes.

Antidepressant Medication

Main form of medication used for the treatment of depression.

Antipsychotic Medication

Main form of medication for the treatment of psychoses such as schizophrenia. These drugs tend to reduce delusions and hallucinations and have a calming effect.

Anxiety Disorder

A mental disorder characterised by feelings of unease, tension and distress with an exaggerated fear of possible danger or misfortune and often associated with significant disruption to a person's life, such as inability to hold down a job or use public transport. Examples of such disorders may include phobias, panic attacks and obsessive compulsive disorder.

Assessment

See psychiatric assessment.

Authorised Psychiatrist

The authorised psychiatrist has specific powers and duties under the Mental Health Act 2014. Consultant psychiatrists in a designated area mental health service may carry out the responsibilities of the authorised psychiatrist under delegation.

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