

# Questions to Ask the Psychiatrist

## A Checklist for Families of Persons Living with Early Psychosis and Schizophrenia

Adapted from <https://pathwayssmi.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Questions-to-ask-the-psychiatrist.pdf>

### How to Use This Guide

Choose from the questions below to prepare your own list, and take it with you to an appointment. It is not possible to ask all these questions in one appointment, so prioritize 5- 10 questions that are most important for you. You may have additional questions of your own as well.

The best way is to have these questions written down, and to write the psychiatrist's answers, as it can be hard to remember everything that is said. Many families and persons with lived experience like to keep a book or journal with a record of events and information that they receive over time. Consider starting a 3-ring binder or other format to keep everything together.

You may find more questions in this checklist from the Canadian Patient Safety Institute <https://www.patientsafetyinstitute.ca/en/toolsResources/Questions-Are-the-Answer/Documents/Patient%20Question%20Checklist.pdf>

### Diagnosis

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> What is the diagnosis? How is this diagnosis made? (e.g. What symptoms indicate that this is the likely diagnosis?) | <input type="checkbox"/> Did the physical examination include a neurological exam? If so, how extensive was it and what were the results?  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> What is the nature of this illness, from a medical point of view?   | <input type="checkbox"/> Are there any additional tests or exams that you would recommend at this point?                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> What is known about the cause of this particular illness?   | <input type="checkbox"/> Would you advise a second opinion from another psychiatrist at this point?  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> How certain are you of this diagnosis?  | <input type="checkbox"/> If your current evaluation is a preliminary one, how soon before you will be able to provide a more definite one? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> If you are not certain, what other possibilities do you consider most likely, and why?                              |  |



## Treatment

- What program of treatment do you think would be most helpful? How will it be helpful?
- Will the treatment plan involve services by other specialists (ie neurologists, psychologists, allied health professionals)?
- Would you please explain how treatment will have a recovery focus, as well as being person-centred?
- Will a Peer Support Worker be available?
- What kind of treatment do you plan to use, and what will be the contribution of the psychiatrist to the overall program of treatment?
- What do you expect treatment to accomplish?
- Are you currently treating other persons with this illness? (Psychiatrists vary in their level of experience with severe or long term mental illness. It is helpful to know how involved the psychiatrist is in treating these problems.)
- How often will you be seeing the person?
- Where can I find more information about this type of treatment?
- What is the best evidence that the person is responding to treatment and how long before these signs appear?
- What medication do you plan to use? (Ask for name and dosage level.)
- What is the biological effect of this medication, and what do you expect it to accomplish? What risks are associated with the medication?
- What are the side effects? Are there any serious effects that we should report immediately?
- What can our relative do to alleviate any side effects?
- How soon will we know if the medication is effective?
- How will we know – what changes should we observe for?
- Are there other medications that might also be appropriate? If so, why do you prefer the one you have chosen?
- Are there any foods or over-the-counter medications that should be avoided when taking this medication?
- How do you monitor medication?
- What symptoms indicate that it should be raised, lowered, or changed?
- If hospitalized, which hospital would it be?
- What are the laws about committal and compulsory treatment?

## Family Involvement/Engagement

- What do you see as the family's role in the treatment plan? (This will likely vary depending on how ill your relative is and whether they are able to make their own treatment decisions.)
- How do you plan to collaborate with us? (This question is particularly important if you will be providing direct support to the person – you would have the legal right to any information you require in order to provide that care.)
- How much access will the family have to individual treatment providers?
- Will there be a Family Peer Support Worker or Family Navigator involved?
- What resources can we access for more information and support?
- When are the best times, and what are the most dependable ways, to get in touch with you? Who will be able to answer our questions when you are not available?
- How familiar are you with the activities of local community support groups for both the person and family?
- How will the family be included in discharge planning?
- Who can we call if there is a crisis or mental health emergency?
- Where can we find support for ourselves?
- If our relative is unable to make treatment or financial decisions, what are our options?

## Some useful questions to ask for special situations:

### If your relative is taking antipsychotic medication:

- Are you or will you be monitoring for depression?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What arrangements will be made to ensure daily medication supervision after hospital discharge?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Will regular blood testing be necessary? If so, how often, and where will it be done?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Does this medication affect blood sugar levels? What do we need to know about that?  
\_\_\_\_\_

### If your relative has symptoms of depression or mania/bipolar disorder:

- Did you perform a thyroid screening?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- If so, what was the result? If not, do you think it would be appropriate to perform one?  
\_\_\_\_\_

### If your relative is over 45 years of age:

- What effect will the medication have on cardiac functions?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Have you obtained an electrocardiogram? If so, what are the results? If not, do you think it would be advisable to do so?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Have tests been done to eliminate all other medical conditions?  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Questions of your own?

REMEMBER: You can always ask for general information even if the psychiatrist is unable to tell you specifics due to confidentiality concerns. And you can always provide information to health professionals about your observations and knowledge of this person and their health, so the professionals can make better decisions.

