

Questions to Ask the Psychiatrist

A Checklist for Families of Patients with Schizophrenia & Other Serious Mental Illnesses

What is the diagnosis?

What is the nature of this illness, from a medical point of view?

What is known about the cause of this particular illness?

How certain are you of this diagnosis?

If you are not certain, what other possibilities do you consider most likely, and why?

Did the physical examination include a neurological exam?

If so, how extensive was it and what were the results?

Are there any additional tests or exams that you would recommend at this point?

Would you advise a second opinion from another psychiatrist at this point?

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)?

Who will be able to answer our questions when you are not 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?

About how long will it take?

How often will you be seeing the patient?

What is the best evidence that the patient is responding to treatment and how long before these signs appear?

What do you see as the family's role in the treatment plan?

In particular, how much access will the family have to individual treatment providers?

If your current evaluation is a preliminary one, how soon before you will be able to provide a more definite one?

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?

Are there any side effects?

How soon will we know if the medication is effective?

How will we know?

Are there other medications that might also be appropriate?
If so, why do you prefer the one you have chosen?

Are you currently treating other patients 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.)

When are the best times, and what are the most dependable ways, to get in touch with you ?

How familiar are you with the activities of local community support groups for both patient and family?

How do you monitor medication?
What symptoms indicate that it should be raised, lowered, or changed?

If hospitalized, which hospital would it be?
Will the family be included in discharge planning?
What are the laws about committal and compulsory treatment?

Some useful questions to ask for special situations:

If your relative has manic or depressive symptoms:
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 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?

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?

It is helpful to write down questions you want to ask. The time for your consultation with the psychiatrist is likely to be limited - having some notes to work from will help you get the information you need before your appointment is over. Some people also find it helpful to write down answers to questions - this can help you to remember the information, particularly about test results and medications.