Adjusting to Life After Hospitalization for Bipolar

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Coping After Bipolar Hospitalization

For some people with bipolar disorder, it may sometimes be necessary to enter a hospital environment in order to access emergency treatment and to ensure that they are safe. At the time, my entries into inpatient were terrifying moments, but reflecting now it is possible to see that this was the best option for me at the time.

You may have to go into hospital if you are a risk to yourself or others, or if everything becomes too overwhelming with a manic or depressive episode, or if you are suffering with severe psychotic symptoms.

Just as going into hospital can be a challenging prospect, so too can coming out again. A hospital can provide a safe environment, but can also lead to feelings of isolation after a long-term stay. Coming out of hospital may leave you feeling exposed and vulnerable, and it is important to look after yourself and monitor your moods more intensely in the months following hospitalization.

Have a Plan

The most important tool in your recovery kit post hospital is to ensure you have firm support from your medical team. Ideally you should be discharged with a written care plan detailing the follow up care that will be provided to you, and you should be made aware of all the contents of this plan.

Communication with a medical team is vital in preventing relapse, and if you have had any medications prescribed that were different to what you were taking before, it is important that you fully understand how they should be taken, and what side effects might be expected. If you begin to feel unwell again then it is absolutely vital that you inform your medical team as soon as possible, and if you feel that you might be a risk to yourself or others then you should attend the nearest ER immediately. Keeping your team aware of how you are feeling, and any changes in mood or thought is vital in maintaining mental wellness.

Support System

Friends and family can also provide valuable support post hospitalization, especially as you get used to life outside the structured world of the ward. You may want to ask a trusted family member or friend to visit you regularly in order to ensure that you are taking your medication responsibly and regularly, and that you are leading a healthy lifestyle. There is no shame in asking for extra support, especially after such a difficult time. Friends and family may also be able to recognize the warning signs of a relapse before you might potentially see them and so are a valuable asset in your recovery tool kit.

Adjusting Work Environments

Returning to work can be a complicated and difficult process, but do not be afraid to ask for reduced hours, or other forms of extra support. If you work for a company or organization that is reluctant to help in this way then it

is important that you consult your doctor in order to obtain medical paperwork showing the need for you to be reintroduced to the workplace gradually.

Workmates will naturally ask questions about where you have been, but remember that there is no requirement that you tell everyone every detail. You can tell people in your own time, and at your own pace. If you receive negative comments regarding mental health then try to remember that this is most often due to a lack of understanding and education and not a comment meant to be a personal attack.

Next page: relapse prevention and making healthy choices

Take Your Medication

Medication can play a vital part in keeping the bipolar mind balanced, and it is important that you take your medication the way in which it is prescribed. Research shows that patients who stop taking their medication have an 80% chance of relapse within 3 months, which could lead to another hospital stay and further setbacks in your recovery. If you feel you are not responding to a medication well then this should be discussed at a medical appointment with your clinician.

Relapse Prevention Kit

It could be an idea to build yourself a relapse prevention kit as something to refer to occasionally, especially when you are feeling unwell. Some key documents you could use in this kit could be a list of local and national helplines, a list of your early warning signs of relapse, and a mood scale by which you could assess how you are feeling at that time.

You could also give a copy of your early warning signs, and the details of your local health team to a trusted friend or family member so they can respond appropriately if they feel you are becoming unwell again. Keeping a mood diary is also beneficial post hospitalization as your moods may fluctuate regularly, and it is important to monitor these so that they do not get out of control without being documented, and the relevant person alerted.

Take it Slow

Your recovery should be conducted at your own pace, and it is important to remember that setbacks are completely normal and this does not mean you have failed at all. Everyone will experience set backs in every aspect of life, and mental health is no different to this. Slow progress may be frustrating to deal with, but it is still progress!

Be Social

You should aim to not socially isolate yourself following a stay in hospital, although this may be tempting, as you want to avoid the many questions people may have. Social interaction plays a vital part in recovery, and encourages you in taking the steps towards mental wellness. You may be anxious at first but even seeing a friend for a cup of tea for an hour will give you a social boost.

Make Healthy Choices

Leading a healthy lifestyle is important for all round mental wellness, and especially so after a hospitalization. Aiming to get even a small amount of fresh air a day, and trying to avoid processed foods and high amounts of sugar can all assist in helping to keep the mind balanced.

Conclusion

Coping with the world post hospitalization is a challenging and at times scary idea, but with putting the above

ideas into practice, it can become a more approachable subject. The most important part of recovery is to listen to your healthcare team, as they have seen you both in periods of illness and during periods of wellness and are thus able to advise you on the best options going forward.