

## Illness Self-Management

### What is illness self-management?

While there is no single agreed upon definition of illness self-management, most definitions converge on describing it as intervention designed to help consumers better manage their psychiatric illness. Using a broad definition such as this, most psychiatric rehabilitation approaches could be conceptualized as illness self-management.

Many people prefer to define self-management more narrowly to refer to it as the management of the psychopathology of the disorder (symptoms, relapses, re-hospitalizations), but not necessarily all the associated impairments (work, social relationships), which then invokes the field of psychiatric rehabilitation. Note, however, that that management of a psychiatric illness requires attention to social relationships (e.g., supports), involvement in meaningful activity, etc., so that effective illness self-management requires focusing on more than symptoms.

### What does illness self-management involve?

The research literature on illness management identifies four different treatment components that were supported by the evidence:

- 1) psychoeducation about psychiatric illness and its management, which has been found to improve knowledge of the illness, but not to influence its course;
- 2) behavioral tailoring to address medication non-adherence, which involves helping people fit taking medication into their daily routines, and has been found to improve medication adherence;
- 3) developing relapse prevention plans, which has been found to reduce relapses; and
- 4) teaching coping strategies for dealing with persistent symptoms, which has been found to reduce symptom severity and distress.

These four treatment components are included in the illness management & recovery implementation kit (or toolkit), developed as part of the SAMHSA-sponsored evidence-based practices project.

### Does illness self-management help with symptoms? Improved outcomes? What are the positive effects of illness self-management?

Based on the research, the positive effects include reduced symptom severity and distress, and reduced relapses and re-hospitalizations. The illness management and recovery intervention teaches illness management skills in the context of helping consumers articulate and pursue personal recovery goals. This program is being disseminated in several states participating in Phase 2 of SAMHSA's implementing evidence-based practices project.

*Reviewed by Kim Mueser, Ph.D. May 2003*