

arranged, if necessary).

- The Transcultural Mental Health Centre  
Cumberland Hospital,  
5 Fleet Street, North Parramatta.  
Tel: (02) 840 3800.

Anyone who is either ill themselves or who is concerned about a friend or relative can ring the centre. The centre can put them in touch with a mental health professional who can speak Arabic, Vietnamese, Turkish, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Khmer, Korean, Thai, Croatian, Serbian, Macedonian, Tagalog, Chinese and Italian.

If a caller isn't confident about communicating in English, the Centre can either take their telephone number and get a worker who speaks their language to return the call, or get assistance from the Translating and Interpreting Service. The centre can also advise English-speaking mental health workers who care for people from ethnic communities. Remember that all conversations with health workers and interpreters are confidential.

If you belong to a community of church group which would like to learn more about changing attitudes to mental illness, the Transcultural Mental Health Service can lend you an excellent 15 minute video in Arabic, Cantonese, Macedonian, Italian, Vietnamese, Croatian, Spanish and Tagalog.

Telephone numbers are correct at time of publication but are not continually updated. You may need to check the numbers in the telephone directory.

NSW Multicultural Health Communication Service  
Website: <http://www.mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au>  
Email: [mhcs@sesiahs.health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:mhcs@sesiahs.health.nsw.gov.au)  
Tel: (02) 9816 0347



English  
[BHC-3405]

## **Does Someone You Know Have A Mental Illness?**

## Does Someone You Know Have a Mental Illness?

Sometimes people don't want to believe that they or someone in their family has a mental illness - often because they're afraid that it will affect their family's good name. But this can mean that a mentally ill person doesn't get the treatment he or she needs. Just imagine if someone in the family had symptoms of a physical disease. Would relatives watch that person get sicker and sicker without calling a doctor? Of course not.

Mental illness is nothing to be afraid of. Like physical illness, it's treatable - treatments include medication, counselling and stress management, for example. Sometimes a person may need to stay in hospital for a while. But besides treatment, there's something else that will help too - a change of community attitude. People with mental illness need our support and acceptance. Without that acceptance, many mentally ill people and their families try to hide the illness from their community. This can make families feel very isolated and can make the illness worse.

The first step towards changing attitudes is to understand mental illness better. Just like physical illness, mental illness (which affects one person out of five at some time in their lives) includes many different problems. Some of them, like schizophrenia and manic depression, can be very serious, while other more common problems such as anxiety and

phobias are less serious.

Some community prejudice comes from the idea that mental illness is closely linked to violence, but people who are mentally ill are no more violent than other people. Another idea is that mental illness is caused by a personality weakness - but this isn't true either. Mental illness isn't anyone's fault - just like diabetes isn't anyone's fault. Nor is it true that mentally ill people are sexually disturbed - most sexual offenders are not mentally ill.

We can all help to change community attitudes by:

- Learning to see mental illness like any other health problem and accept that if a person acts strangely it may be a symptom of mental illness, just as a cough can be a symptom of the flu. Try to learn more about the illness so you can understand why the person behaves strangely.
- Showing friendship and support to friends, relatives, neighbours or colleagues at work who are affected by mental illness and encouraging other people to do the same.
- Encouraging people who are mentally ill, or their families, to seek help.

Places which can help with mental illness include:

- Community health centres - interpreters can be