

Press release:

Brussels, October 10, 2014

'We need to let psychologist intervene sooner to reduce the risk of developing schizophrenia!'

Today, on [World Mental Health Day](#), the focus lies on living with schizophrenia. EFPA, the European Federation of Psychologists Associations, makes a strong cause for early detection and intervention for patients with a risk for schizophrenia. 'Thanks to psychological research we now have more effective tools for early detection and well established preventive treatments. We simply need the guts to invest in them,' says Robert Roe, president of EFPA.

Schizophrenia is one of the more severe mental health disorders one can encounter. With symptoms such as delusions, hallucinations and impairments of speech, motor abilities etc. it can be a frightening experience for both patients and their close environments. Schizophrenia affects about 7 per thousand for the adult population. Although considered to be a severe mental health disorder, treatment is possible and can result in a productive life for the patients where they can integrate fully in our society. That said, it is crucial that treatment can start as early as possible. Clinical psychologists can play an important role in this process.

"As a result of psychological research it is now possible to detect those patients who have an increased risk for developing a first psychotic episode, often the starting point for schizophrenia. [Important research](#), for example by Dutch clinical psychologist Dr. Dorien Nieman (AMC_University of Amsterdam) has shown that, by detecting information processing deficits with specific brain wave patterns, we can better predict the onset of a first psychosis in subjects with risk symptoms such as mild paranoia. Through this method psychologists were able to determine a risk group with up to 75 % chance of developing a first psychotic episode" explains Roe.

The next step would be to start preventive psychological treatment for that specific group. Roe gives an example to illustrate: 'For instance, one of the essential aspects is the way patients interpret symptoms like for instance occasional voices they hear. It is possible to teach patients to re-interpret these symptoms in a less harmful way. For instance, you can teach patients not to interpret those voices as being part of a diabolic process but instead as an innocuous phenomenon that many people experience at some point in their life and learning how to ignore them. Psychological treatment protocols utilised in this risk group reduces the chance of a first psychotic episode by up to 50%.

Helping patients with risk symptoms to reduce the chance of developing schizophrenia could be a major cost – effective intervention, but can only be realised if governments pay more attention to the specific competencies of psychologists and to lower the thresholds for psychological interventions. "We do see in many countries that patients often find themselves confronted with different thresholds (lack of reimbursement, waiting lists, referrals by general practitioners) to consult a psychologist. Governments should take steps to render greater access to psychologists for their patients.

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<http://www.psy.vu.nl/en/research/research-projects/research-by-department/clinical-psychology/vroege-opsporing-schizofrenie/index.asp>

http://www.who.int/mental_health/world-mental-health-day/2014/en/

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