

PRESS RELEASE 新聞稿

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Hospital Authority Launches E.A.S.Y. Programme

The Hospital Authority (HA) launched the E.A.S.Y. Programme (Early Assessment Service for Young People with Psychosis) today (23 September). In addition to providing assessment and appropriate treatment for young people with early psychosis, the HA will also conduct an extensive public education campaign to raise public awareness on early psychosis so that young people who may have the problem can be identified and referred for treatment at an early stage.

Early psychosis is an abnormal mental state. The thoughts and feelings of people with early psychosis are often out of touch with the reality. Other common features of early psychosis include confused thoughts, delusions and hallucinations.

While people of all ages may develop symptoms of early psychosis, its incidence among young people aged 15 to 25 is particularly high. If young people with early psychosis can be detected and treated at an early stage, the chances of early psychosis developing into various mental diseases can be greatly reduced. In addition, the earlier the intervention, the greater is the chance for full recovery.

However, since not many people are aware of the state of early psychosis, symptoms are often misconceived to be the normal fluctuations in the tempers and moods of young people, and delay in seeking treatment is often resulted.

The E.A.S.Y. Programme consists of two components: public education and assessment and treatment for young people with symptoms of early psychosis. A hotline: 29-283-283 and website: www.ha.org.hk/easy have been set up for public enquiry and referral of cases. The HA will also conduct extensive public education through the mass media and organize talks and workshops for social workers, teachers, doctors, parents and the general public to familiarize them with the E.A.S.Y. Programme.

In addition, four service centres have been established. Upon receiving referrals, these centres will conduct immediate assessment for referred young people. A multi-disciplinary team (consisting of doctors, nurses, social workers and clinical psychologists) will design and tailor-make treatment programmes for those requiring follow-up treatment. Treatment may consist of medication, psychotherapy and early adaptation programmes, with the aim of helping young people with early psychosis to a speedy recovery and resumption of a normal life. An additional funding of \$15 million was allocated by the Government each year for the E.A.S.Y. Programme.

In order to have a better understanding about the public awareness of symptoms of early psychosis, the HA has commissioned the Hong Kong Polytechnic University to conduct a public opinion poll in September 2001. Results of the poll show that misconceptions about early psychosis are common. Nearly 80% of the respondents had the misconception that middle-aged and elderly people are most prone to symptoms of psychosis. Nearly 30% did not know that when people develop symptoms of early psychosis, they should first seek treatment from doctors.

Although over 90% of the respondents indicated that treatment should be sought within a month after the onset of symptoms of early psychosis, local statistics yet show that people with early psychosis in the past sought medical/psychotic treatment, on average, only after one and a half years after the onset of the symptoms, which often had an adverse impact on the effectiveness of treatment and chances for full recovery.

Dr Hung Se-fong, Consultant of E.A.S.Y. Programme, said, "Seeking treatment at an early stage is critically important. Those who seek treatment at an early stage show better results. Conversely, early psychosis may develop into mental diseases if not tackled well at an early stage. Patients may take a longer period to recover and may stand a lower chance of going back to a normal life.

"Our alertness towards early psychosis should be similar to that towards a fever. Although a fever is a common symptom, it may be an early sign of more serious diseases such as pneumonia if not treated early. Through the E.A.S.Y. Programme, the HA hopes to raise public awareness of early psychosis and the importance of early intervention."

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