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Are you taking your tablets? The family, the service and the service user: Diverse perspectives on mental health

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This presentation briefly describes the effect a mental health diagnosis can have on families. Some families feel stigmatized by having a member who has experienced mental illness. Children may be afraid of being contaminated by the mental illness of their mother or father. Parents may be blamed for causing their child's mental distress. Brothers and sisters; husbands and wives are often criticized for failing to insure their loved one complies with his treatment plan. Perspectives vary. How individuals diagnosed with mental illness are viewed by their family is often very different from how they see themselves. In turn, family members have diverse experiences of mental health services and the professionals they encounter. Some experiences are positive with strong family involvement and an open invitation to work in partnership with staff. Other experiences are more problematic. Inherent power imbalances, concerns regarding privacy, fear of negative outcomes and the need for an exclusive patient-professional relationship can inhibit positive working relationships. Family members often feel isolated, frustrated, undervalued and excluded from mental health services and the care of their loved one. For some, their family is a source of support, friendship and security, providing them with the strength they need to cope with life's challenges. However, they may also be a source of tension, cruelty, abuse and uncertainty. Individuals may not wish their family to be involved in their care. Consequently, reconciling these varied medical and social perspectives and unique lived experiences can be challenging. 'Are you taking your tablets?' uncovers these fundamental difficulties, endeavoring to point a way forward in which service users, families and service providers can work together for the benefit of those most affected by mental illness - the service user.

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