

Social Media Usage and Symptomatology in Patients with First Episode Psychosis

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Schizophrenia is a severe complex psychiatric disorder characterized by symptoms such as auditory hallucinations, delusional thinking, diminished ability to emote and interact socially, and cognitive impairment. The first episode of schizophrenia manifest in late adolescence or early adulthood, a critical time period for development. Disruption of development frequently leads to psychosocial dysfunction. Early identification and treatment is key. Engagement in treatment is important for patients in the first episode of psychosis (FEP), but is a major challenge for healthcare providers. Concurrent with emerging research on social media usage in the general population, recent literature on the social media usage in patients with psychosis has also expanded. On average, adults in the general population spend about 12 hrs/wk on social media and recent findings have suggested that patients with schizophrenia, despite experiencing significant difficulties in social functioning, utilize social media, as well. Such findings suggests an opportunity for novel interventions that utilize social media to increase treatment engagement. Intervention of this kind is new and has so far shown modest results in increasing patient adherence to treatment, but few studies have specifically analyzed social media usage and symptomatology. Researchers analyzed social media usage of FEP patients in relation to the symptomatology. Data collected at the Prevention and Recovery Center for Early Psychosis (PARC) between 2011 and 2015 was compiled and analyzed. While there were no significant correlations between symptomatology and social media, researchers discovered this patient group spent less time on social media compared to the national average. Therefore, access to electronic devices and social media usage should be considered when developing interventions.