
Interviewing Family Members and Other Informants: Tips and Guidelines

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Introduction

This fact sheet provides a practical guide for conducting interviews with family members and other informants to better understand your patients. These interviews generally take between 20-40 minutes, depending on the quantity and quality of information being shared.

Key Interview Topics

Perception of Patient's Hospitalization

- "Why do you think [the patient's name] needed to be hospitalized?"
- "Were there specific events or behaviors that led to the hospitalization?"

Recent Behavior

- "Can you describe [the patient's name]'s behavior leading up to hospitalization?"
- "Have you noticed any changes in their behavior or demeanor recently?"

History of Mental Illness

- "When did you first notice symptoms of mental illness in [the patient's name]?"
- "How has their condition evolved over the years? Has it gotten better or worse?"
- "Have they ever behaved in ways that placed them or other people in danger?"

Treatment History and Response:

- "Can you provide details on past treatments [the patient's name] has undergone for their mental health issues?"
- "Have they been attending their outpatient mental health appointments and taking their prescribed medications at home?"
- "How has [the patient's name] responded to previous treatments, including medications, therapy, or other interventions?"

Family History of Mental Illness:

- "Is there a history of mental illness in the family that might be relevant to [the patient's name]'s condition?"

Substance Use:

- "Has [the patient's name] ever used substances such as alcohol, prescription medication for non-medical reasons, or illicit drugs? If so, how has this affected their mental health and behavior?"

Baseline Assessment

- "At this point, do you believe [the patient's name] is close to their baseline level of functioning?"

- Tips: This question can be more useful later in the hospital stay when some improvement has been observed and you're evaluating whether the patient is ready for discharge.

Discharge Planning

- "What needs to happen before [the patient's name] can return home?"
- "Is there a plan in place to ensure [the patient's name] will have reliable transportation to make it to their outpatient appointments after they're discharged?"
- "What kind of support do you think [the patient's name] needs immediately after discharge and in the long term to maintain their mental health?"

Further Diagnostic Information-Gathering

- Once a level of trust and rapport has been established with the informants, further probing into the patient's history, symptoms, family background, and personality can provide additional diagnostic information.

"I would like to delve deeper into [the patient's name]'s history. Are there any aspects you think we should pay attention to?"

- "Can you share more about any significant life events or experiences that might have affected [the patient's name]?"

Getting to Know the Patient Through Informants' Eyes

- It's essential to spend some time understanding the patient as a person. The informants' insights can shed light on the patient's interests, hobbies, and daily life outside of the hospital environment.

- "What kinds of things does [the patient's name] enjoy doing in their free time?"

- "What are [the patient's name]'s hobbies or interests?"

- "Can you share a positive memory or experience you had with [the patient's name]?"

Assessing Impact and Resources

- Understanding the impact of the patient's condition on their family or community and the resources available can help tailor the therapeutic approach and discharge plan.

- "How has [the patient's name]'s condition affected your family/their friends/their community?"

- "What kind of support system does [the patient's name] have outside the hospital?"