

Original Paper

Philosophical Attitudes to Mental Illness and the Role of Hope

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Does the mental health system make a difference to people's quality of lives? Mental illness can mean starting again with life and is not the end of the world as it might seem starting on your journey into the mental health system. The first thing is to rationalise our experience with schizophrenia and come to terms with it. To begin things do get better over time and will continue to get better whatever doubts we have> So, the struggle with schizophrenia is ultimately worth it.

The suffering and the waste combine to making us feel profoundly depressed and the answer cannot be down to completely to medication. What is needed is an understanding of the social situation of schizophrenia and what can be done to help it. The whole thing may seem like a waste but it is possible to come to terms with this and the suffering. Much depends on how we see life and how much suffering can be endured.

Suffering can be alleviated by relaxation classes at a day centre and the emotional pain can be soothed by support from friends and staff and family in various ways. You cannot know what schizophrenia is like unless you have had it yourself so sharing your experiences with others with the condition as at day centres is very important. Then it might allow a basis for a friendship and to be able to help people in this way. Once we overcome our own suffering, we will be sensitive to the suffering of others and will want to help them. You will need to empathize with what they are going through as only another schizophrenic can.

For Maslow emotions for love and friendship maybe shut down by the fear. Compassion may be needed here. Then once we establish emotional relations with each other we can then esteem each other as people, and this could be useful versus critical voices. We can counterpose what our friends think of us to what the voices think. This conversation can be distracting and supportive at the same time which makes it doubly good for dealing with voices.

Loneliness is painful on top of the delusional emotional pain of in my case for causing 9/11 so you have not to give up on life. This is something compassion can soothe with us again, as is insight, but with the emotional pain this is only half the equation as we need to find new social contact. Yet feelings of isolation

can still occur her even with family support and may mean we spend long periods on our own with nothing to fill the emotional gap. Keeping busy will not cure loneliness as it is such an important need. The stigma can also be terrifying and cut you off emotionally but sheltered accommodation can protect you and day centres can provide another lifeline here. Stigma is something else that can be dealt with compassion, and you may feel like a social outcast. Day centres can ease the pain here by forming new friends. We learn we are not to blame for own illness and we show much courage in dealing with it. A more compassionate society would understand this.

Schizophrenia destroys all hope for your dreams, but you can look at John Nash for inspiration. You have got to be strong enough to pursue your dreams and compassion might give you this. In addition, the big bad world is frightening but so is schizophrenia and confronting the illness could lead you to take on other challenges. You will derive much self-esteem by overcoming your fears of the illness and the frightening stigma so you will feel better about yourself vis a vis the voices. You will have the strength to stand up to them.

Does love make up for the suffering? It stands more chance in combination with the compassion, and both together will soothe and strengthen more and provide another way of learning you are not alone in your struggle with schizophrenia. This tender loving care goes beyond what friendship and staff support from social workers can give you and each other. Here the struggle with the illness will be easier if someone believes in you which can give you positive reinforcement with it.

The more compassion calms you down the more chance there is of being distracted. With time on your hands 24/7 you can keep busy around the house as well as doing courses at a day centre. You cannot keep busy all the time so when the symptoms start creeping back into mind there will also be the need to confront them. All the same the capacity for being distracted opens up the possibility of being interested in things going on in life and ends up so we enjoy it. In my case I find it very distressing to watch a movie together with some take away food, to wind down on an evening in my own home.

So, is schizophrenia a waste as it has prevented you doing what you would otherwise have done? This is equivalent to looking what you have achieved over the years and the relations you have formed. Life can be interesting as it gives you a chance to pursue your education and meet interesting new people. This should keep you motivated to get out of bed, and you can get out and enjoy food, travel, shopping, cinema with your friends to enjoy life. There had get to be something to get up in the morning for.

If your depressed with the suffering, you won't feel like doing the activities and will not be up to having a chat as the low mood will not be so lifted. The answer here is again that meeting someone and falling in love could also restore your interest in life. Then you are more motivated to distract yourself in these ways as falling in love is another source of providing hope and it just means you need and haven't met the right person yet. This make take some time but once it realised it is possible to live singly until then. Finding employment is another goal you may be deprived of but work is a lot of pressure and schizophrenia is thought to be stress induced. Yet the illness is stressful too and you can learn ways of dealing with it and compassion focused therapy might give your employment opportunities more of a

chance. I have found the step-by-step approach of supported graded exposure might help lead in this direction too.

Again, friends and partners can be supportive with the stress of finding work too. Having a partner may allow for deep emotional commitment and love is profound. This is very important to coping with many things in life that may have drove you mad in the first place. The support will reduce the stress that is inducing the psychotic episodes and make it easier to get through them. This will make you more functional, so the prospect of working is more believable.

All the same the episodes will keep happening and might have to be addressed as finding a job could bring more stress. Coping with it will need to be built up gradually as finding a job could be distracting and is something which is called therapeutic work. Yet if the severe episodes persist you will not be reliable so work might only be possible in less severe cases. Compassion and supported graded exposure could be useful here as could taking some Valium as all this will help you concentrate.

The problem is that you might have lost family support with the stigma. This may also be true for partners and friendships. It will make the stress of being schizophrenic worse and you will have to get over all this and establish new relations. Eventually you will establish new social contacts which will help the symptoms and again you will gradually get to be more functional. You can eventually start to think about life on more normal terms including forming new goals and how to achieve them.

The point is to find something meaningful in life and this will depend on the individual. Education could be something you never had time to pursue and might make up for not having a job. In my case pursuing my writing has been *raison d'être* even without work and I have done many stimulating courses all of which has introduced me to learning new skills. This has amounted to establishing a new way of life where I am satisfied to use my creative skills to do something important.

Leisure is also possible if you have a passion for something and in my case, I got back into archery. You cannot study or work all the time to take your mind off things so doing a leisure activity becomes very important. The problem here is that you might get paranoid about the other people in the club, and you cannot tell them you are schizophrenic. So doing things at home might be the only alternative like playing computer games or listening to music.

You won't initially feel like this with schizophrenia but once you get into the atmosphere of the day centre and meet the staff and other service users this will rub off. Then keeping busy should have been kick started as the social side you can take your mind off your problems, though this assuming there is enough let up so you can concentrate. Having time on your hands makes you dwell on your problems, and you cannot sit around the house all day so must bite the bullet and get to the centre despite the paranoia.

There might also be problems with having children as schizophrenia tends to run in families and after a while in life you may get to the point where this is one of your goals. There are serious issues here with bringing up children if the parents are mentally ill. Again, there is the problem that the stigma may cause

emotional problems for rearing children and the fear the illness is causing may shut down your emotions. Compassion once again might solve these problems, but some of the risks are still there.

Another problem with the illness is that without work you might not afford the house you want. This is especially true if you need to live in sheltered accommodation where there is going to be less privacy and reduced space around you. Yet here is some hope here as new housing is being built for social needs so it might be possible to find something a bit more modern which can have many therapeutic and empowering consequences.

Overall the point is not to give in and to keep holding onto your dreams as that will motivate us to keep us focused on something else in our lives that we would really love to achieve. The issue then becomes to mean embracing the positive side of life with schizophrenia in spite of the suffering. You need to believe in yourself that you can do something about your problems despite how insurmountable they may appear. Then you will see yourself making progress so realising your dreams is still possible again like John Nash and Elyn Saks. We are confronted by the question that if life is not a waste does it also make up for the suffering?

To do this we must realise it is possible to lead a relatively normal life with schizophrenia even when we may feel we are missing out of everything in life. This should be the first step to getting motivated to achieve our goals and there are many approaches to the suffering which could help us restore our interest in things. That should stop the overwhelming effect of fear and pain on the schizophrenic mind and allow us to think about something else.

The first of these approaches is of course medication and is always hope the illness will be cured. New drugs are being developed all the time as scientific breakthroughs mean we are learning more about the brain. Currently only a third of people are being cured but that raises interesting questions. I often think of wonder drugs like clozapine which increased the cure rate and hope new ones will be developed that do the same.

New talking treatments are also being developed in addition to existing cognitive approaches like compassion focused therapy. These two ways of dealing with things can be used to restore life with schizophrenia back to some sense of what it was like before and will open many doors for doing this. This account will illustrate a variety of way this can re-establish what has been lost through having schizophrenia in addition to other solutions that can be used.

Keeping busy Is very important and a lot of people find it interesting to do voluntary work. If unemployment is leading to the depression voluntary work could give a sense of purpose as it is helping other people. This could then lead to finding a job as it will give you some further meaning in life and permitted work is allowed while you are in the mental health system. All the same this is just part of the equation and other things have to be brought in with it too so we can get back to normal.

We may enjoy the challenge of confronting the fear and hanging in there. If you take it step by step and coexist with the fear this should be possible. It is possible to get out and about with someone to go with you and provide support. Then you can practice breathing exercises and take lavender or rock rose with

you. Once calmed down you should be able to concentrate enough to drive and having a car can significantly improve your quality of life. Then you can use it for travel and going on holiday and take your friends places with you and driving is a very enjoyable experience.

Going on holiday is one of the highlights of the year and can be enjoyed with friends providing they are well enough to go with you. This can be very relaxing, and a change is as good as a rest. Going abroad is possible once you have learned to deal with the symptoms and in my case, I had a letter from my psychiatrist to give to a doctor in case anything went wrong while I was over there. Until this was possible my family were able to fill the gap here and take me places when I was too frightened to go without them. Much depends on how often the most severe episodes are and the more intense they are the more support you will get as in sheltered accommodation or going in and out of hospital. This may not always be a negative experience and there are other ways of coping in addition to this support. You may go from terror to being in love, so the intervening episodes are going to be very therapeutic and help you get through the worst times. Also being in love with someone who loves you too will be good so that you feel valued despite the critical voices and your partner or family then can talk back to the voices and answer them.

There is also the possibility that supported graded exposure and relaxation classes will calm you down enough to open up your emotions. The voices can be frightening like the paranoia and so practising overcoming this can help with them too. Once we do this there are going to be different outcomes as both the therapeutic possibility and problems of emotional awareness come into play. Then the emotionally supportive and painful sides to life with the illness will come to the fore.

A lot of people have family support but still commit suicide. Despair with the illness could cause this so it is important not to give up hope. Talking to other people who have been living with the illness for a long time and meeting them in the flesh at day centres could be inspirational here. It maybe these suicidal feelings will pass as will the psychotic episodes and even life will improve again even with severe schizophrenia as it does end up with a normal life.

There is also a role for Valium an antidepressant. Breathing exercises can be combined here. This all might calm you down enough for opening up the emotional tier. Then if the illness manifests as episodes calming down with the fear in between should open up your emotions to help you deal with the pain involved with the delusions and voices. Again, being calmer could help clear your head and may help you reflect on any insight you have which might help you get through things until they wear off.

If these techniques are used to calm you down at these times they can also be used to counteract the subconscious overload caused by the schizophrenia. This has the effect of causing nightmares if sleep is preceded by an episode. Yet the problem is still that even the overload is stopped and cures the nightmares you are still going to be very frightened which can still be exhausting. Again, this can cause problems with getting to sleep and you will constantly be resetting your body clock and being awake for long periods.

The same problems with curing the nightmares will reoccur as not sleeping properly can be serious as you will be getting less rest from the symptoms. Not sleeping impairs our ability and strength for being distracted, using confrontational strategies and ultimately in getting towards a state of perceived recovery. Then with the illness things will remain more stressful and will cause more episodes. The same cures for the stress we have been outlining can be used here even though, so we are not overwhelmed by the problem.

If Valium Is not used you may not get to sleep properly as you may be too frightened and keeping awake all the time could be exhausting, affecting both functionality and therapies in the same way. At this point leaning to overcome the fear and pain through supported graded exposure will be needed if it has got to the point you can deal with the fear of going out on your own. Yet during a prolonged episode of terror this exposure approach might not always be possible and having some insight it will pass might be needed to combine with it to get to sleep.

The emotional side of life with schizophrenia can help with getting to sleep as well as being compassionate which can soothe the emotional pain that will keep you awake. If you have family support, friends and partners this will also help in addition to the compassion. Then you will be stronger for the next episodes and won't be so frightened about the effect this too has your resilience and functioning. Once rested you will be in a better position to deal with the fear next time.

Yet again all the different ways the mental health system can help you as outlined here can soothe and support you when the fear comes into play. You know these episodes will pass and that should clam you down enough to get to sleep. Then once the sleep pattern begins to return to normal we may derive the same therapies from all the good things in our lives again. It is just a matter of hanging in there until these feelings pass and knowing that they are nothing to worry about. Thinking of the good things in your life will ease the pain.

Compassion can give the strength to cope with a relationship when things get difficult in it. It allows connectedness with other people so the chance for emotional contact with friends and partners will become more possible opening up the possibility of getting married. Afterwards overtime as with many things in life relationships are not easy so having friends and family to provide advice becomes very important. You have to work at it but these new stresses are being balanced of being in love.

In life we don't do too badly out of the system in material terms, but we still have to make difficult choices. The main one is whether to have a car or eat and travel. A vehicle would take all my money despite the freedom it gives you and nothing else would be possible. Here much potential therapy is lost and there is a need to make money. So all this may not be enough and will depend on succeeding in what you goals in life. Once again it needs to be that these goals can be achieved and that brings in john nash again.

It was important to my psychologist to keep a pleasure diary as this can help with mood. Again, you have got to live it up as much as possible in so far as your finances can allow. If it is spent wisely, you can make your home a therapeutic environment with furniture and electronics though it is important to get

out as much as possible and dress while you are eating and shopping. If you let yourself go with yourself and your home, you will feel more depressed and in getting pleasure from it will require some initial motivation.

Many other things can be pleasurable like sharing things with friends and partners especially but even with such normal pursuits in life people can get bored even including when being in a relationship. Having things to do at a day centre is not enough as they want careers and are chasing success. The effects of these problems are profound and can seem to drain life of its meaning which will result in a deep depression. No amount of compassion will solve being bored and nothing else will fill the gap.

There is still hope here as the employment service can link in with employers that are sympathetic to the illness. The answer is that if you can cope better with the symptoms through compassion you might be strong enough to hold down a job. The mental health system can help prepare you here with its courses and our local further education course offer mental health support in class. The problem of stigma remains with finding employment but there is growing evidence attitudes are beginning to change.

Compassion makes it more possible to confront things. This is important when you are on your own and without the supported exposure. It can be used as a backup plan if you cannot coexist with the fear, so you don't have to panic and run. The graded exposure might help with the fears of stigma so you can act normally when meeting your neighbours or around people who might find you too unusual if you try to avoid them.

In addition, you can always run back into the house which will calm you down again as you can use it as living in an actual instead of an imagined safe place. You can use it to calm down when the symptoms get to much and this will help keep you out of hospital as you will stay functional. It allows you to concentrate so you can distract yourself and being at home will become pleasurable. It will be a first step to getting out and enjoying taking on life as it will be a sanctuary for any problems.

Yet there are motivational problems with schizophrenia, so you have to live it up. This will make you more functional for doing courses and things that require more effort. Again, this will be particularly so in between episodes, so you don't paint everything in life in black with the illness. Then the paranoia can seem like the end of the world but taking gradual steps combined with the insight it will pass and life will return to a pleasurable normality which can help take the edge of this and get you through it.

Often people end up emotionally and socially isolated and without this life can seem to lack a motivational reason for the distracting activities. Yet for others compassion can be emotionally motivating as it connects with people and this opens the door for formulating goals in life. Not having any ties or responsibilities the illness provided a golden opportunity to these goals and I went back into education at a local further education college. Pursuing your goals is the best distracting thing you can do and is the most enjoyable.

Other problems arise from breaking up relationships which with a mental illness could be seriously stress wise and may prompt a relapse. Given the divorce rate in the UK this could be a serious problem. This is another role for compassion which might keep you out of hospital. Even so the symptoms may

deteriorate with stress and the emotional pain of the breakup which will add to the pain of the voices and delusions about 9/11. Yet the graded supported exposure might prepare you for the symptoms coming back.

In the case of a separation your friends and family will rally round you and will remind you that one day you will meet someone else. You will do your crying out in the pouring rain here, but you will still have people around you that care about you. They will remind you time will make sure you get over things. If it does cause a relapse you will know from previous history of dealing with severe times that you will get through this the same way as before.

So, you can rely on friends and partners as a source of strength but if you are paranoid about everybody schizophrenia can make you isolated and withdrawn. Without proper emotional support there will be no strength left for tackling the fear and your emotions will be shut down. Insight will help with self-growth as you will not be cut off from your family which could be serious as it will stop progression on the Maslow tree. Without insight you will be more susceptible to fear, and your emotions won't be brought out properly. This could avoid a nervous breakdown.

If you have had a couple of breakdowns hope might be reduced. You can come through one breakdown but two will be more serious. So, we must remind ourselves even if you fail there is a place we belong, and this is true whatever else we are missing out on in life. This only works if you are able to find friends and partners but many people end up socially isolated so it might not work. So, the only other answer once you given up hope for your goals is to have hope that you might fall in love again.

Another problem with hope is the feeling of not getting where you want to be in life. This can cause much dissatisfaction under normal conditions but is very significant with schizophrenia. It maybe the positive opportunities available through the mental health system will not fill this gap and telling yourself life doesn't always work out the way you want will not cure this feeling. It may still be a problem even when in a relationship and can be added to the other stresses with schizophrenia.

Not being able to work may affect your financial situation and in material terms your circumstances may once again not be sufficient. Then for some the Marxist problem of alienation might have to be overcome first, though again the feeling maybe we don't do too badly out of the system again is possible. These feelings are stronger than just dissatisfaction and may equal the feelings of hopelessness after a breakdown. At the same time hope could help these problems altogether.

What the question then becomes is that there is so much more in life apart from being successful. We must learn to say at least you have still got other things in life even if we don't win. This can include a great number of things so that if we cannot be completely happy, we might at least be content. We can still value what we have even if our dreams didn't work out and this is true of ordinary life as well as with schizophrenia.

Overtime you will become part of a growing organic community at day centres and your emotional relations will become more therapeutic as they deepen. The same thing happens in a relationship as stress levels are progressively reduced the symptoms will ease. Then the more you overcome the fear the more

chance emotional contact can occur and build strength for more fear reduction. That strength will overcome the anxiety and depression in between episodes.

Other useful approaches are also possible here. When the terror periodically sets in the fear may shut down the positive emotional side which could have soothed it. Yet you will know that when it wears off things will go back to the normal state. All you have to do to is to hang in there and tell yourself it will pass. Once again insight is useful here as you will know there have times where you were thinking psychotically and that should calm you down enough to be able to tackle the fear.

Also, if you can question the delusions the fear will not shut down the emotional side as much and you might be more resilient to the painful delusions and the voices. This should reduce the stress you are experiencing and help with confronting or distracting yourself from the paranoia. It will clear your head to think about the delusions and allow you to question them further and again you will know you are eventually getting through these relapses.

Often schizophrenia causes a subconscious overload and this comes back to you as a form of continual anxiety. These thoughts are not going to go away as there are still there at the back of your mind and continual anxiety without any let up can be a serious problem. Here insight and supported graded exposure can help again as if we can question or confront these thoughts this will stop it going over our heads so some distraction is then possible.

Yet some people are lonely, and this puts the emphasis on family support if it has survived the stigma. Without this the problem is to meet someone as this will be as profound as family contact and friendship might not fill the gap here. All the same being dumped by your family is still going to hurt and may make you especially vulnerable if the relationship answer doesn't work out. Then you don't want all this depression on top of the schizophrenia.

It also helps to remember that there are the best family occasions like Christmas and birthdays particularly if there are children in the family. Again, being on your own at this time of year can conversely be very difficult and you have to manage as best you can. Having a partner could be crucial once again here but not being able to see the kids in the family is acutely painful too. Alternatively having young people in the family can make up for not having kids of your own.

Often, I have found it possible to go home and stay overnight. The feelings of belonging here are stronger as the place is full of happy memories and is like going back to your roots. Living in a new area has meant that over time I could put roots down there, but it is not where I am from. I can stay in the house I grew up in and identify with where I am. The family atmosphere is stronger than that aimed on a ward or sheltered accommodation and is a stronger sense of therapy.

Family contact maybe limited if your relatives are too busy, so friendship becomes very important. If you have not established new friends sheltered accommodation is a good answer here as living with people, you get to know them very well indeed. Even so the current thinking here is to aim towards independent living as more therapeutic, but this is not always the case. I feel there are advantages in both arrangements depending on your needs.

Being prepared for independent living might open the door to living with a partner so moving out of its confines could be very therapeutic here. Without this the 24/7 marital environment might be better substituted by the 24/7 social environment of a mental health project. This means uprooting from another organically grown community to being able to have your own place. Living independently means having your own place but and has to be prepared for carefully but it can improve your mental health.

When first introduced to the mental health system this normally means an admission to hospital as it needs on going care and support. This may need to be continued by a mental health project once discharged. Being on your own with the voices and delusions means you have to cope without this help and so needs to be done first. So having had supported graded exposure to the fear when out and about meant I was left on my own to do this in places. I was frightened by psychotic memories, and this prepared me for moving out.

Going to day centres was another factor here in that it got me motivated to study and keep active. That motivation required me to push myself to get up and face the day by giving something to look forward to. Once there I began to take on the workload of doing a computer course and passed the exam for it. Being able to work like this helped a lot with self-care and housework needed with independent living and got me prepared for this. That gave the place a homely feel as I wasn't slumming it.

Even without a partner there are other ways of living and being single life can be enjoyable. Once you learn coping mechanisms your friends will be at the end of the telephone for a supportive chat, and you can begin to enjoy long periods in your home environment. So you can cope on your own without the need for intensive therapy and learning this could help with moving on and make the advantages of moving out more feasible. I still kept in touch with the people I knew and invited them round for some food and drinks.

Without frequent social contact keeping busy will not be enough to deal with the voices and there are going to be prolonged periods of time where you are exposed to the symptoms. Staying in the house will concentrate your mind on the voices, and you will associate the place as somewhere you have been ill even if you have tried to make it somewhere you feel at home. It is helpful to get out and do things like exercise as this breaks the time up so being on your own is more tolerable. This problem might have a cure.

Conclusion

With the suffering we grow as people. Ordinary life can be hard and anyone with schizophrenia will understand this. Yet much of this can be endured if the extreme symptoms can be dealt with and we can pass on that recognition to other people who will know what you mean. The step-by-step approach to confront the symptoms outlined here is not easy but if you have a philosophical attitude to life, you will be more accepting and open to the struggle involved. All the same the approach has limits as many people will end up committing suicide but with a philosophical attitude to schizophrenia this might be answered. You will have to come to terms with your life but this is possible.

The Role of Hope in Schizophrenia

The role of hope with schizophrenia has a twofold effect in that it can prevent the onset of the illness and help us overcome it once it has developed. Both are very important. If we can catch it in the prodromal stage we can stop it before things get out of hand. Then once symptoms develop, we can reduce the severity with the help of the mental health system.

What first helps cause schizophrenia is that you have given up hope in life when you are confronted by its stresses and struggles. Yet it is an answer to the illness that this sense of purpose and direction can be rekindled which will help cope with and prevent the illness self-perpetuating.

I developed schizophrenia at age 22. Up until that point life was progressing normally and I was happy with how the future looked. When I got schizophrenia all that changed, and it seemed like everything just stopped. What I learned with things was not giving up.

At that age I simply wasn't prepared for what was about to happen and was simply too young and inexperienced to know how to cope with it all. Not being strong enough and without partners or my family, who were also going through similar problems, meant I was on my own with things.

Schizophrenia is thought to be stress induced and the key to preventing it and coping with life is to never give up. Yet that can be very difficult sometimes when your problems seem too overwhelming and there is no strength left to deal with them.

I was emotionally drained with life after the breakup and extremely depressed by the loss of our family business. There were no emotional resources left to cope with the symptoms of schizophrenia which were beginning to emerge. I was defenceless in the face of it.

The situation needed emotional support but there was no one to rely on. My family were going through the same problems and having broken up with my partner there was no help to heal it all. I was on my own with what happened and would have really needed the mental health system.

During the onset of schizophrenia, I was living at the opposite end of the country and without the social support that could have helped with it. I was isolated more than I might have been and yet didn't want to give up the course and go home. The stress levels were getting worse all the time.

At this point during the milder onset phases some family and emotional support might have reduced these lower levels of symptomatic stress. This would have helped me cope with the symptoms before they got completely out of hand. But as my family were going through much emotional trauma this wasn't going to be healed.

Another factor for the onset stage was to stick with your work as keeping busy would take your mind off things. Yet academia was the only thing I was interested in, and it was a lot of pressure so that just made things even worse. There was going to be no meaningful distraction at this time.

I tried to stick with things with study as they were the most important things in my life but should have packed up and gone home. I endured them as long as I could. This added to the stress, and I wasn't strong enough to stick it out and so eventually went over the edge.

What made the situation more difficult when I first started hearing voices was the way this would sound to other people. Being frightened I would be labelled as going mad, I got even more stressed out. That made the psychoses worse and produced more frequent episodes.

The university had a counselling service, but I wasn't about to go and tell them I was hearing voices. There was no information displayed at the university that the students might get mental health problems. Even so I had been through so much I didn't think they were preventable.

This service could have been another factor in preventing the illness if they could catch it during the onset stage. The outcome of that was I might have not had to give up the study and this would have kept my hopes and dreams alive. The counselling help could be very effective here.

If things in life were easy enough to handle, then having hope would make us more resilient to the onset of schizophrenia. Then we would come through our problems. There is some truth here as hope can help us deal with the schizophrenia so all of it might have had an answer.

Yet schizophrenia can make you suicidal as people give up in the face of the suffering. It is generally more severe than the life episodes that initially caused it. With the help of the mental health system, you can begin to see there might be a way forward again which may not be visible at the outset.

I went from one extreme to the other with life and simply wasn't prepared for so much change all at once. Moving house was one of the most stressful things you can do, and a relationship breakup was another. I had both of these in addition to ending up living in poverty and together it was all too much. Again, proper material conditions while I was studying could have helped a lot.

I felt the whole thing of life had come to an end. There seemed no way of getting back to normal after what had been lost and there was no point in continuing with it. Yet one thing kept me going which was my dream of being an academic.

The relationship breakup caused a lot of emotional pain, but I was able to soothe this with study. The problem was that a lot of other things that went wrong at the same time including again the bankruptcy and the loss of the house I had grown up in.

Without these resources behind me my dream seemed ever more out of reach and unrealisable. That meant there was no therapeutic distraction and when I eventually snapped as I couldn't hold down a high-pressure job in research. I had to give up on things.

It is often thought that if you are going through hell keep going but going through hell can cause schizophrenia. Then you simply cannot cope with things in life. Hope and time are not enough to sustain you through all this, and it is too easy just to snap.

It takes time to come through a breakdown, but all the stress can drive you mad. So, the possibilities of healing and soothing don't get a chance. After that the schizophrenia is much worse even than the life events that caused it and you cannot simply keep going.

The emotional pain I had been through was worsened by the criticism of the voices. Then the stressful life changes were made more difficult as a result of the illness. This was added to by the new delusional thinking I had caused 9/11. I went into shock when the business went bankrupt and when the delusions

hit me, I went deeper into shock. In sum all the things life could throw at you got worse and worse and were duplicated by the illness.

The low point came with the emotional responsibility of thinking I had killed all those people at 9/11 and the fear that the CIA were going to torture me to death for it. This meant that having no hope didn't matter and it all prompted a suicide attempt. I wasn't simply going to keep going with things.

Yet what I learned in dealing with the schizophrenia was that having hope was therapeutic with the paranoid symptoms. With insight I could question these thoughts, and this calmed me down enough to pursue my goals. Hope hadn't disappeared and became the essential coping strategy.

So, just when I thought things couldn't get any worse, they deteriorated much more. Schizophrenia is thought to be walking alone with through the valley of the shadow of death which I think is a good description. That was the way it seemed to be initially.

The trick is to realise that you are not alone and that you can get help. There are some things that are good coping strategies despite the popular image of severity. So thankfully the experience is not so bad as the public image of it.

The healing I had with the illness in the mental health system was that I began to see there were ways of coping with things. So that life with schizophrenia need not be the end of the world which was the way I had first experienced it.

The process of inspiring hope meant that all the original problems that had caused the loss of your dreams in the first place had to be dealt with in a holistic manner. That included finances, emotional support and graded exposure to stress. The mental health system can provide all of this.

Hope is not a uniform experience, and the sense of hope builds and comes more into view as we progress through the mental health system. You need to focus on it all the way through your journey within that system and not to lose sight of it.

Initially I was introduced to inspirational people like John Nash who had remained in academia, which is where I wanted to get back to. But to get back to being hopeful this was not enough and there had to be other coping strategies to do this. I found there were many of these.

On going to my local day centre, I could meet people who were doing courses in spite of having been in hospital and severely ill. I could see first-hand that they were coping with it out in the community and again this inspired the feeling things were not hopeless.

Hope also requires some motivation to tackle the academic challenges of the day centre courses on offer. Having lost so much together with the suffering with the schizophrenia meant I was severely depressed. This required an anti-depressant, but these were not effective on me.

I began to realise some of the important things in life with schizophrenia were emotional and though I had love and support from my family this only helped so far. So, suffering with the pain in my hopeless life and with the illness I still felt sad about everything. There didn't seem much reason to get up in the morning.

At this point in order to tackle the depression the most important thing was to be hopeful again as without this in life there was going to be no motivation. I could also soothe the low mood with making new friends and social contacts but only so far. What I really needed was my life back on track.

I could at least cope better with life in the mental health system and found my new finances and emotional contacts kept me going with things. Coping was one thing, but I knew that I wouldn't be happy until things returned to the state I was in when at university.

I had to take this very gradually as I was in no fit state to simply pick up where I left off. The courses on offer at the day centre weren't at this academic level but were a good place to start. I found my brains hadn't completely gone even though the fear had shut down my frontal lobes.

At the day centre I was able meet other service users who had followed the path I was starting out on. They had been to university despite their mental health problems. Again, this was inspirational and unlike John Nash I could see them in the flesh and so began to believe more in being hopeful.

When I first encountered the symptoms and was struggling with the schizophrenia, whilst trying to study, I was on my own with these problems. Now in the mental health system there was social and emotional support which acted as back up to the study stresses, I was now contemplating.

I started going to the day centre two afternoons a week. Having met everybody and calmed down in the social atmosphere I could concentrate on the courses on offer. I found them very engaging and once I got interested my motivations returned. This helped with the seemingly hopeless low mood again.

The best thing to do I thought was to try something new which I hadn't studied before. That was going to be an achievement. I found an information technology course which I thought was more technical than academic. Then I got confident enough, after a number of months, to sit an exam on it.

I passed the exam and began to feel that If I could one course, I could do another. I still kept my hand in doing information technology and became quite highly qualified which helped further. Yet I felt able next to take on something more academic and did an A level in sociology, which I also passed.

All the time hope was building again but I still didn't feel ready to go back to university. Here the academic work I was doing at day centres wasn't of the same level. There was still too much stress from the illness to allow this. So, I had to next do some coping strategies.

A high-pressure job like that takes some building up to and the schizophrenia was a great opportunity to tackle this. If you can come through the symptoms this should lead you in the right direction. This seemed to be easier said than done. I had to be hopeful again.

It was necessary to try some distraction and confrontation to calm down and confront your problems, even with schizophrenia. If you take things one step at a time you can build up enough strength to overcome the stress that perpetuates the illness and then get back to more study.

The first thing to do is to get the stress down to more manageable levels so you can concentrate more. Then when calmed down the distraction has more chance. I found the day centre courses were very absorbing. At this point I began to believe in achieving my dreams of study more so. I had taken that first step and began to look ahead.

To begin you need to deal with the fear which will completely stop you getting out of the house let alone going to a day centre. Once you take a series of steps you can learn to control the fear as you gradually build up resilience to it. This again should be regarded as another hopeful achievement.

The hope with the fear aspect then began to build and it seemed more likely that I would get over the more severe problems it would cause. I started to think that I might overcome it even when it initially seemed insurmountable, and I could get much more hopeful with it.

If you have already had a breakdown this needs to be handled carefully, as another will much further destroy what hope there is. Having someone to go with you to places where you have memories of paranoia can help you cope with the fear and allow for graded support exposure.

Having sedatives and vallums was essential here at the worse times. So again, you can get a bit hopeful that you will get through the worst of it. Yet that still leaves plenty of problems with the more normal levels of fear but as you gradually expose yourself to it you will deal with it.

Compassion is a useful tool here as that will soothe both the fear and emotional pain but needs proper teaching as it is easier to give it to other people than it is to yourself. That should stop a second breakdown along with the Valium and again that thought inspires much hope.

Compassion can also help with the stresses on your higher-level courses and should be a useful tool for tackling subject matter which is much more difficult. The pressure to succeed will be lessened and in turn the ability to cope with all the work will be improved.

So once you have overcome some of the stresses of fear in schizophrenia you will be also in more a position to handle the stresses of doing a course which can be very demanding. Then one thing led to another and in particular to the most difficult part which is sitting the higher exam.

If you pass you will again feel like you will have achieved something very difficult, and you should start to acquire some self-confidence. You can begin to plan the next step and formulate your series of goals with some more belief of succeeding with them. This is another stage of on your journey of inspiring hope as it makes you less likely to give up again.

As you begin to tackle the higher levels of fear then taking on greater and more difficult challenges becomes more and more possible. This will reduce the fear down to more moderate levels and help with the remaining low mood. Higher levels of effort and ability to concentrate will then come back to aid with higher study and then the sense of high achievement will be much stronger.

Then we will feel more like our old selves and our original interests in life will come back. Your initial motivations in life will still be there but you will be back in touch with them again. You will remember what they mean to you. You will feel more able to pick up on life where you left off.

All this won't be immediately visible during the first onset of the illness, and it is necessary to take things slowly and not to give up on the way. It is important to realise the system can provide hope when we are first introduced to it and the support staff can guide you through it as things progress.

If the mental health system can catch you early enough a second breakdown is less likely and there is more hope you will come through this. In my case I only snapped once with the life stresses, so I was lucky I got help before the schizophrenia got bad enough to cause a second one.

The medication had an important role to play as it stopped me hearing voices all the time and crucially this allowed me to concentrate. So, I found I could do the course at my local mental health day centre, and this was the first step to getting my brain working again with the illness.

Voices can make you isolated and withdrawn and there is a need to confront or distract yourself from what they are saying about you. That can ease the emotional pain they cause and allow you to engage in normal social relations again so life can get back to normal.

There may be a need here for a clinical psychologist to take your side in the face of severe criticism from the voice so they can be muted. This is another technique that can help you concentrate and allows you to develop the emotional strength needed to take on life with study.

In sum this I eventually I began to feel life had some meaning again as it was possible to make new friends and partners through the mental health system. I could distract myself from the illness this time as my dreams began to feel alive once more and I wasn't on my own with things now.

In many ways with the help in life after the initial onset of the illness meant things were able to calm down and I came out of shock. I had new friends which soothed the emotional pain I had been through and also got over the stresses that I had experienced with the research I was doing.

The lesson here was that all the things that life can throw at you can be healed within the mental health system, despite the variety of problems that can occur or combine. This will need explaining at the outset of being diagnosed as that will feel like life has come to an end.

Given that people can all so easily give in to the schizophrenia when it first happens, we will need to catch it in the prodromal stage. At this point we need to give a full explanation what can be done about things, so it won't feel like waking up in Armageddon, which is the way it seems to a lot of people. We need to know that we are not on our own.

One other thing that stands in the way of your dreams is the stigma that can prevent you getting a job and this is a serious problem for hanging on to your hopes. In my case there were inspirational figures within academia like John Nash and Elyn Saks so this wasn't going to be a problem.

This is another reason to catch it early on before the illness as the associated stigma can destroy your goals. This can lead us to deal with the initial symptoms before they get too bad and prevent us doing what we want in life as the symptoms won't be so visible to others.

Then we can also begin to challenge the other problems of stigma involved which can also make things seem completely hopeless in different ways. This can also stand in the way of where we might want to get to but there is growing evidence attitudes are beginning to change.

When I first started hearing voices the experience of the stigma made things impossibly worse. The world was labelling me as mad which added to the feelings of isolation and hopelessness I had been experiencing. So again, I asked the question what was the point?

Once introduced to the mental health system I began to realise this was another mistaken perception I had been experiencing. It was possible to live a normal life even when society excludes and rejects you. I began to feel less alienated.

The things everyone else does in normal life are available to people with mental health problems and again you can enjoy life the way everyone else does despite being labelled mad. This again provided a much-needed outlet for the stress I had been going through and I started to calm down a bit more. There were supportive therapies available here.

That realisation about the stigma was vital to getting my life back to the point where it could support study. I needed to have proper material conditions to help sustain me through what I was trying to do and was better able to take the challenge of going back to research.

When the illness first started stigma seemed to stand in the way of everything and seemed to be so omnipresent that this was another feeling of giving up hope. I had no idea that there was so much support available and discovered this only very gradually. Again, it should have all been explained.

Yet what I learned most through the mental health system was that educational opportunities were supported in colleges by the advice and support services, so my study goals were no longer a problem. Wanting to learn the setup of courses at day centres was tailor made for me.

This realisation first struck me when I was active in hospital. I also realised with insight that I was safe in the mental health system and from anyone who might stigmatise me. Then on discharge into sheltered accommodation I was also protected which reduced my stress levels significantly.

Then when realising I was free from the stigma, I began to find I could calm down and could concentrate more. After being discharged from hospital I was able to move into sheltered accommodation which by its very name protected me again from the stigma.

In hospitals and mental health projects there were proper material and financial conditions available which had a soothing impact on my life. I then began to feel empowered which helped me take on the illness and overcome the stresses of it at the more moderate levels.

I had the feeling that things were returning to the life in the way I had before the illness, and this inspired the hope things would get back to normal. That was a great relief as when the business went bankrupt, I felt that everything was over. Then I found that in time there might be a way back.

Hospital was a god send after the slum I was living in and that produced an immediate sense of relief, and this eased some of the depression I had been experiencing. Once cheered up I felt more able to take on the frightening symptoms and did not despair. It was soothing to be at home.

Slowly I began to believe the beliefs I had were not the end of the world. There was professional help in the project I was living in which provided emotional support which further soothed the pain about 9/11. Crucially there were also people on hand to remind me of the insight I had about 9/11.

The symptoms when I first got them seemed so overwhelming there was no way of coping with them but with the support, I had learned this turned out not to be true. Instead of being alone with them as in the popular image I came through the hell they caused.

By this stage in my life, I had much more input and support from family than at the outset when the illness first developed. Previously they had problems of their own, but they had come through the depression. So, they were able to offer emotional help which helped strengthen further me for taking on more stressful goals. I began to believe achieving them was more and more possible.

One key feature involved here was that the hell of the psychoses was not all the time and I had breaks from it in between episodes. Instead of living in terror of the next phase of being ill I began to learn it was possible to engage with life normally which reduced my stress levels a lot.

That helped me get through the worst parts in that I knew they would eventually wear off and all I had to do was hang in there until things returned to normal. I then had less depression and anxiety so that when things returned to normal there was hope again to get on with life.

This sense of things returning to normal meant I was more able to cope with the challenges in between and helped put me in a better frame of mind where I could settle down to things more. I began to find that meant I could concentrate on other things like study.

In many ways this felt like starting again in life and although I had given up on my dreams, I found I still desired them. That kept me motivated in life despite all the emotional pain I had been through as there were still things I wanted. The problem causing the pain was alleviated by the fact that there were still ways of achieving things.

My brains had not been completely destroyed by the fear of schizophrenia shutting down my frontal lobes and once calmed down enough to concentrate I found much of my intellect was still intact. All the same I had got a bit rusty during the early years of being ill and needed to exercise them again.

The problem with being delusional about 9/11 was that it was completely mind numbing and there was nothing else to think about. But having spent some time in hospital talking to nurses I found I could distract myself from these thoughts by talking about them. So, at this early stage I could then concentrate on something else more academic.

I began to read again and found the subject matter was very interesting. This took my mind off the psychoses, and I was wholly absorbed in something else. I still had my thirst for knowledge, and I then began to get more motivated in life with things academic. It rekindled my interest.

Once I felt things returning to normal, I began to look at my life again and reconsider it. Overtime as I gradually learned to deal with the schizophrenia, I realised there were gaps where I could heal the emotional and financial pain I had been through. The original sense of loss was replaced by my new life. Instead of living in a slum I had the finances to make my house into a home and again this got things back to normal. This further prevented the feelings of alienation I had experienced with the additional poverty stresses that had first caused the feeling of not coping with things at the start.

I was also able to get out and enjoy life a bit more which was never possible after the bankruptcy and although not to the same extent I still felt I was able to live a bit. Again, this removed some of the original stresses and felt more socially inclusive in respect of the stigma.

During the worst symptoms of the schizophrenia there wasn't time to think about anything else and in between episodes I was so caught up with the worries of what was happening to me I was completely distracted by it all. There simply wasn't time to try and heal the causes.

Yet once in the mental health system I began to calm down and had time to reflect on what had happened. The help I received over the years had changed much in my life and I began to realise the original stresses had been slowly removed and things had improved.

That helped with the time in between episodes and had the feeling life had begun again. This made things less stressful and so the incidents of being ill were less frequent and more bearable. I could get through them knowing how good life would be afterwards, being able to return to study then.

Measuring up to my problems over time made me think of John Nash much more and I realised that as the times in between got longer and more frequent i could more time get my brains back more into gear again. There was going to be time for prolonged study and so exercising the mind once calmed down.

In the end I didn't go back to university with this opportunity and took up writing about mental health instead. Even though I got my brains working again so far, I still had to build this up gradually and take small steps to practice it. As with study the more you exercise the brain the better it gets.

This process started in hospital, and I wrote a short article for a mental health magazine which got published. I really amazed myself I could still do this and during the worst times when on an acute ward this inspired some hope that there might be another way.

Although only a few paragraphs long it was at the same level as the work I had done at university, and I realised that what I had written was going to point the way. Again, maybe things were not as hopeless as they have seemed as I was able to do this despite the breakdown.

That feeling was consolidated shortly afterwards when I did a couple more for the same magazine. I was then impressed by having multiple things published in a space of time, as this was more of an achievement, and I began to realise this might lead somewhere.

The next articles I did were longer and went to mental health charities like MIND and RETHINK and then the writing began to get acknowledged. By this time, I had found the knack for doing this and so one thing led to another until today I had written many books on the subject.

Conclusion

When I first got the symptoms of schizophrenia, I had given up hope for my life which made it difficult to deal with the stresses that initially caused it. Then during the early phases there was also nothing to resist the initial symptoms which were more stressful and so the illness got worse and worse. Then with support of the mental health system I began to see how my dreams were still possible which was the most important therapeutic part for dealing with my schizophrenia.

The answer to dealing with each of these problems is not to give up hope which can soothe all these stresses but that is easier said than done. This is particularly important to the causes and first onset of the illness so to stop it getting out of hand before things like having a nervous breakdown or going into shock

make the stress problems much worse. After that the mental health system can help in more effective ways but it is better for the severity to catch it before then.