

## KEY:

Speaker No. 1 – Bill Pollock

Speaker No. 2 – Dr. Denise Walker

## Transcript

Speaker 1

Welcome back to Show Me Today. Early psychosis can dramatically change the course of a young person's life, but experts say the earlier it's identified and treated, the better. In Missouri, a statewide initiative called EPC Missouri is helping communities respond faster through coordinated specialty care. This is a team-based approach, and joining us is Dr. Denise Walker, who will talk about how early intervention works and why understanding risk factors like substance use is so important. Dr. Walker, thank you for joining us.

Speaker 2

Yeah, thank you for having me.

Speaker 1

For listeners who may not be familiar with the term, what exactly is early psychosis and what are the first warning signs that families might notice?

Speaker 2

Well, early psychosis is essentially that period of time when a young person or an adult experiences their first episode of psychosis and start to experience symptoms of psychosis. So I think that early psychosis is usually that first few years of that from the onset of those symptoms.

Speaker 1

Why is it so important to identify and treat psychosis as early as possible?

Speaker 2

Because if it's identified and treated early, the outcomes are much better. People can actually recover from psychosis. people can. If if it's treated and intervened early. Sometimes people are able to even be symptom free, and in later later in life and later adulthood. But essentially just that recovery and management of the symptoms seem to

go better. They you know, have can have fewer symptoms, fewer impairments related to their symptoms with regard to job and school, family relationships. So treating it, identifying and treating it earlier is better for people.

Speaker 1

EPC Missouri promotes coordinated specialty care. What does that approach look like?

Speaker 2

Coordinated specialty care is a phenomenal treatment approach that has been shown in a lot of research to really help folks who are young adults who are experiencing early psychosis to improve those outcomes over time. So coordinating specialty care involves, it's exactly what it sounds like. It's sort of intending to be a one-stop shop for, you know, young folks experiencing psychosis. So it involves a medication provider, so an MD or a nurse practitioner who can provide prescriptions and manage medication involvement. It involves something called an IRT specialist, so that they work on coping skills, resilience, those kinds of things. Oftentimes that includes a social worker who can, you know, work with the individual on managing their symptoms. um, coping skills, things like that. It has, um, resources for job and education because, you know, these folks are in that period of time of their life where they're, you know, either, you know, continuing their education or looking for employment and launching their lives. They also have peer support specialists. So they have, uh, individuals engaged in those programs who have gone through similar things, have had, have the diagnosis, and are, you know, living their lives. So they get another individual to talk to who has gone through maybe similar things before. And lastly, they usually have a person who can work with the families that the young adult is involved with because this really can impact families to a huge degree. And oftentimes families are involved in the young person's care.

Speaker 1

That's Dr. Denise Walker, she's joining us. We're talking about a statewide initiative called EPC Missouri that deals with early psychosis. And I'll generalize here, and correct me if I'm wrong, Dr. Walker, but you focus on substance use and how that affects early psychosis. Is that correct?

Speaker 2

Yeah, specifically cannabis use.

Speaker 1

Late adolescence, early adulthood, critical periods for brain development. How does cannabis use intersect with the risk of early psychosis during that age period?

Speaker 2

Yep. Well, cannabis use has two huge sort of impacts on psychosis and psychosis populations. The first is that cannabis use in adolescence or young adulthood actually increases one's risk of developing psychosis or schizophrenia in later adulthood by five times. So using cannabis, I think, you know, in our society is really thought of as something that's harmless, it's not a big deal, it's no problem. but in actuality using cannabis especially heavily and um the high potency kinds that we have available in our country um increase one's risk if you're using in adolescence and young adulthood of developing schizophrenia or psychosis by five times so that's that For individuals experiencing psychosis or who have, you know, a diagnosis of schizophrenia or another psychosis disorder, using cannabis really interferes with their outcomes from treatment or even for that, you know, psychotic disorder. So continuing to use cannabis is related to increased hospitalizations for psychosis, increased symptoms, decreased medication use, decreased medication effectiveness. It just basically leads to folks not being as happy or, you know, as productive or leading kind of the lives that they want to lead in their later years.

Speaker 1

If a family is worried about a young person's behavior or substance use, but they don't know how to bring it up, and that can be tough, what does a supportive, non-judgmental conversation look like?

Speaker 2

Yeah. So if you're, you know, concerned about a loved one's cannabis use specifically, opening up that conversation, just as you described, in that non-judgmental, sort of open kind of way where you're curious about why the individual's using what they're getting out of it, what sorts of positive things. And then also, you know, if you start in that way, oftentimes that will, you know, and you hear and you understand some of the reasons why they are using or what they feel like the benefits are. then that can be a way to sort of grease the wheels to open up the conversation of, and how might it be getting in the way? Or, you know, what sorts of negative things have you found from your use? What sorts of things don't you like about using cannabis or what sorts of consequences it's had? Um, having that kind of a conversation, you know, again, where you understand sort of what they're really, what the intention behind using it is and what they see as the benefits, um, leading to also an opportunity to talk about maybe what the costs of using or what they've

noticed. Um, and then being able to, you know, offer, you know, this is what maybe even with permission, you You know, I've noticed some things about how your cannabis use has affected your mood or symptoms, your behavior in school or work or relationships. You know, could I share that with you? So I think those are some of the basic elements of that first conversation where people can express concern and raise the issue. Have you been thinking about your cannabis use and how are you thinking about it right now?

Speaker 1

Some interesting points being brought up here by Dr. Denise Walker talking about the use of cannabis and how it affects psychosis. This is all brought to you by EPC Missouri. Dr. Walker, if you have that conversation, I think one of the challenges then, too, is there has to be motivation to change. So how do you help someone recognize that substance use might be contributing to their mental health struggles?

Speaker 2

Yeah, I mean, motivation to change is always at the center of any behavior change, right? If we want to start an exercise program or eat differently or stop our, you know, reduce our social media consumption, whatever it is, or substance use, we need to be sort of motivated and interested in changing. And so motivation to change, I think, can be strengthened when people can identify their own reasons for doing that. Um, so that second part of the conversation around, um, you know, what, what about your use has gotten in the way or what about your use that you don't like? Those are essentially reasons for change and can help a person think about, um, what they might get out of, you know, what might be the, what's in it for them, essentially, for making some type of a change. And so helping people think through, you know, how is your cannabis use? How might your relationships be better? How might your school or school work or attainment be better? What is important to you? You know, essentially, what, what are the things that are important to you? What do you want to accomplish in the next year or two? And how does cannabis, um, you you know, help or hurt you in your ability to attain the things that you want for yourself. So I think those are ways to help someone strengthen their motivation to change if they're really tying their use and stopping or reducing their use to tangible benefits to them.

Speaker 1

The 2026 Early Psychosis Care Conference is coming up the 24th and the 25th. Will you be attending in Kansas City?

Speaker 2

I absolutely will. I love that conference.

Speaker 1

It's at the Sheridan Kansas City at Crown Center. What are you most looking forward to sharing with attendees?

Speaker 2

I'm actually, this year, usually I talk about cannabis and the interventions that we're trying to develop and test with regard to implementation within psychosis care. But this year I'm going to be talking even more generally about motivation to change. So, and ways that providers can talk with their clients that might increase their their motivation to change whatever they're struggling with. It might be tobacco use, it might be medication compliance, it might be, you know, going back to school or starting exercise, but whatever is important to them and how to, how to use skills that might really promote that motivation to change.

Speaker 1

Registration is still open. If you go to [epcmmissouri.org](http://epcmmissouri.org), you can register for the conference, the 24th and 25th again. And if you want to get this conversation, if you came in on it late, Dr. Denise Walker is sharing some great stuff. Of course, it's on our podcast. Search Show Me Today on all of our platforms. Dr. Walker, thank you so much for your time.

Speaker 2

Absolutely, thank you.

Speaker 1

This is Show Me Today, The Voice of Missouri.