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Use of GP services over a five-year period after an episode of depression

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Background: Depression occurs frequently and is mostly treated in general practice. Little has been reported about its long-term course and long-term use of medical services. **Aim:** To follow up patients with these depression in general practice for five years, looking at the length and number of index episodes, prescribing behaviour and use of services within general practice and compare them with patients with psychological symptoms and mentally healthy patients. Design and setting: A case-control study based on data from Electronic Medical Records (EMR).

Methods: Three cohorts of patients with depression (N=453), anxiety symptoms (N= 442) and emotional distress (N=185) were compared against a cohort of control patients (N= 4156) during a 5-year follow-up looking at the occurrence or recurrence of the index disorders, other psychological disorders and medical disorders, numbers of prescriptions and the number of contacts with the general practice.

Results: The depression group had 1.1 follow-up episodes of depression, the anxiety group 0.9 follow-up episodes of anxiety and the emotional distress group 0.5 follow-up episodes of emotional distress during five years. All three groups had more consultations (for both psychological and somatic reasons) during each of the follow-up years than control patients. Furthermore, they are given more prescriptions for psychopharmacological treatment.

Conclusion: Five years after the index episode in 2007, patients with an episode of depression, anxiety or emotional distress are still not comparable with control patients, in terms of the prevalence of psychological disorders, the number of prescriptions and healthcare use. Depression appears a chronic disease.