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Analysis of the participation in psychoeducational groups in primary health care

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Background: Depression is one of the most prevalent diseases in primary health care (PHC). Psychoeducational interventions are designed to help educate patients about their particular conditions such as psychological or physical disorders. These therapy groups are usually easy to implement in PHC. There is scientific evidence which supports the effectiveness in treatment and prevention of mental disorders.

Aim: The main objective was to improve the quality of life through therapy groups. Specific aims were:

- To increase participants self-esteem.
- To learn about mixed anxiety-depressive disorder. To encourage patient's autonomy and decision making in front of certain critical situations.
- To reduce anxiolytic and antidepressant medication, if possible.

Method: - Descriptive, cross-sectional study. - Group activity were 12 sessions, one per week, with 10-12 patients. Each session lasted 90 minutes. It was performed in the room designed for health education of the primary health center. - Sessions were supervised by health professionals acting as leaders and observers (doctors, nurses and social worker). - The main topics treated were: healthy life style, knowledge about depression/anxiety and group skills, among others.

Results: Most of the subjects were women (92%) with ages ranging from 38 to 77 years old. The average age was 58 years old. 60% of the participants suffered from mild depression, 10% from moderate depression and 30% from anxiety. 90% of individuals were taking antidepressants medication. After one year of assistance to the groups, the consumption of antidepressants reduced to 80% and anxiolytics consumption reduced to 90%. Assistance to sessions was 80%.

Conclusions: Patients improved their self-esteem and showed more resources and autonomy to face difficult situations. Reduction of medication also showed the effectiveness of the intervention. Health professionals evaluation was very satisfactory.