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Family doctors' role in early identification of mental disorders in Romania

Dumitru Matei, MA Iancu, CM Smith

University of Medicine and Pharmacy Carol Davila, Bucharest, Romania

Corresponding author: Professor Dumitru Matei, University of Medicine and Pharmacy, 'Carol Davila', Department of Family Medicine, Bucharest, Romania. E-mail: drmateidumitru@yahoo.com

Background: Given the alarming increase of mental disorders incidence in Romania we have considered that it is extremely useful to assess the early identification tools available to diagnose mental disorders for the family doctors, how they currently use them and what should be done in the near future.

Method: Our goal was to evaluate the use of early diagnostic tools in daily practice using a simple questionnaire with only 12 questions addressed to family doctors from Bucharest and surroundings (urban areas). We were interested in the degree of usage for recommended questionnaires like MMSE, autism, postnatal depression, the 2 simple questions for depression, Hamilton scales for anxiety and depression or PHQ-9.

Results: We have analyzed the answers from 60 family doctors, out of which 68,33% are consultants, 28,33% specialists, 1,66% GP's and 1,66% medical residents. The average age is 46,91 years old and 16,66% of them are men, the rest-women. 85% from our group offer around 20 medical examinations per day, 28% of them summing up to 500 a month. 37% of the respondents have noticed clinical signs of mental disorders for 5-10% of their patients. Only 20% of them use standardized questionnaires for early diagnostic of mental disorders. The same percentage, 20% obtained a 25-50% diagnostic confirmation rate for a mental disorder suspicion from their colleagues, the psychiatrists while 45% had even a better rate of 50-100%.

Conclusions: There is a certain reluctance of family doctors in front of the mental disorder diagnostic due to the time constraint and the lack of proper adaptation for the screening questionnaires to their daily practice. On top of the current difficulties in using the available early diagnostic tools the family doctors are confronted also with the reduced number of psychiatrists that they can collaborate with (very low number versus the population needs).