Local adaptation of guidelines for identifying mental disorders in primary care may not improve patient outcomes


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QUESTION: Does local adaptation and dissemination of the WHO ICD-10 Primary Health Care Guidelines for Diagnosis and Management of Mental Disorders improve patient outcomes?

Design
Cluster randomised trial. Practices were randomised in pairs after stratification by practice social deprivation score. It is unclear whether outcome assessors were blind to intervention allocation.

Setting
Urban and rural primary care practices in Bristol, United Kingdom; October 1997—May 1999.

Participants
Primary care practices were the unit of randomisation and analysis. 30 practices with 250 general practitioners, locums, and assistants were included. The mean practice list size was about 4200 (range 900–7300).

Intervention
Half of the practices received a guideline intervention and the other half received no intervention. The intervention involved local development and dissemination of the WHO ICD-10 Primary Health Care guidelines (1996 version). General practitioners (GPs) were encouraged to adapt the WHO guidelines with colleagues from local psychiatric services. One GP from each intervention practice participated in guideline revision workshops.

Main outcome measures
The main outcomes were detection of minor psychiatric morbidity (sensitivity) at practice level and 3-month clinical outcomes among patients with 12-item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ 12) scores greater than 3 at initial screening. Secondary outcomes were quality of life, disability, patient satisfaction with care and the specificity of detection performance at practice level. The authors used a random effects model to compare outcomes.

Main results
There were no significant differences in the sensitivity or specificity of mental health diagnoses among practices that received the guideline intervention and those that did not. There was no difference in clinical or secondary outcomes among patients at 3 months.

Conclusions
Local adaptation of the WHO ICD-10 Primary Health Care Guidelines for Diagnosis and Management of Mental Disorders does not appear to influence clinician behaviour. Applying the guidelines may not improve detection rates or outcomes for primary care patients with mental disorders.
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