

# Core competencies of Family Physicians in primary mental health care



WONCA Working Party: Mental Health  
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## WONCA Working Party: Mental Health



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2017 - Non-drug  
interventions for  
common mental  
health disorders  
in PHC



2018 - Patients  
with Medically  
Unexplained  
Symptoms

### Mental Health



*the working party meets in Rio in 2016*

### Why we need a working party on Mental Health

Our vision is to provide a universal gold standard of care for mental health by empowerment through primary care and in collaboration with all interested stakeholders.

A high proportion of patients presenting to family practitioners suffer from some

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### Core Competencies of Family Doctors in Primary Mental Health Care

- **1. Values:** Family doctors consider mental health to be important.
- **2. Communication skills:** Family doctors adopt person-centred approaches to assess, manage and support people with mental health problems.
- **3. Assessment:** Family doctors identify and diagnose common mental health problems, and can identify severe mental health problems and assess risk.
- **4. Management:** Family doctors manage people with common mental health problems, and the physical health of people with severe mental health problems.
- **5. Collaboration and referral:** Family doctors use a range of available options and resources for care of people with mental health problems, and tailor them to patients' and carers' needs.
- **6. Reflective practice:** Family doctors take care of their own health and well-being

### 1. Values: Family doctors consider mental health to be important

- Family doctors ***treat mental and physical health as of equal importance.***
- Family doctors treat patients with mental health problems with ***dignity and respect***
- Family doctors take ***responsibility*** for diagnosing and managing patients with mental health problems, and support their families



**You take one patient's expression of suicidal ideas just as seriously as the next patient's presentation with chest pain!**

**2. Communication skills:** Family doctors adopt person-centred approaches to assess, manage and support people with mental health problems



- Family doctors listen actively and are respectful and **non-judgemental** at all times.
- Family doctors use information-gathering skills to elicit symptoms as well as **patients' ideas, concerns and expectations**
- Family doctors express **empathy and compassion** for their patients' distress
- Family doctors manage problems and make **culturally appropriate shared treatment** plans with patients

**3. Assessment:** Family doctors identify and diagnose common mental health problems, and can identify severe mental health problems and assess risk



- Family doctors **diagnose common mental health problems**, including depressive disorders, anxiety disorders and substance misuse.
- Family doctors **distinguish** common mental **disorders from normal responses to adverse and traumatic events** e.g. grief reactions
- Family doctors assess how mental health problems affect the **patient's daily functioning**



- Family doctors undertake **risk assessments, including suicide and self-harm, neglect, risk to others and risk from others**

**In ambulatorio...**

Si presenta alla tua attenzione una donna giovane per un dolore addominale. Le chiedi quale pensa sia la causa di questo, quanto è preoccupata e cosa vorrebbe che io facessi per lei.

Ti risponde che non sa quale sia la causa, ma che è molto difficile sopportare il dolore. Inoltre è preoccupata perché sua madre ebbe un dolore simile e risultò esser dovuto ad un cancro dello stomaco. Vorrebbe essere sicura di non avere un tumore gastrico e che il suo male passasse.

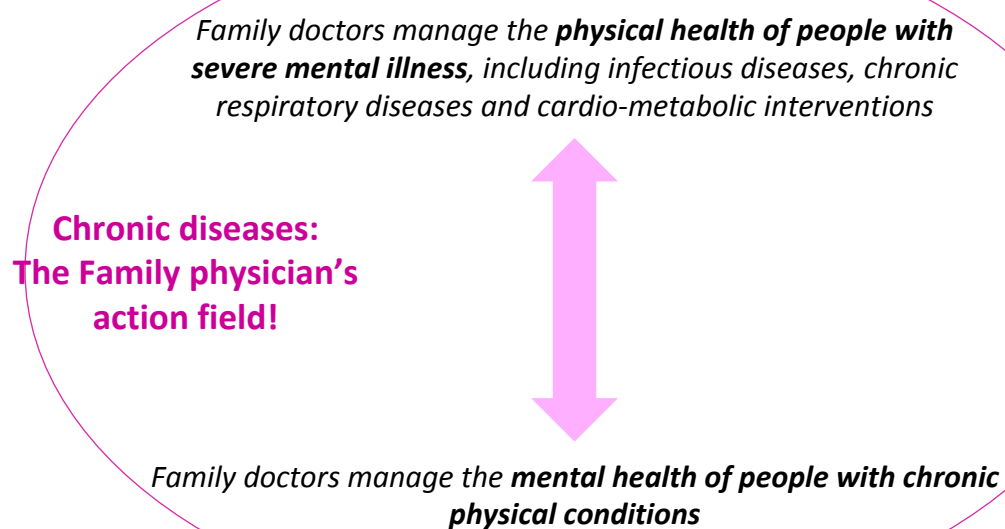
Dopo aver ascoltato attentamente la sua storia le spieghi come sia un'evenienza poco probabile per lei. Le comunichi che gli esami effettuati mostrano che non ha un cancro e che gode di buona salute. Tuttavia le dici che la aiuterai a gestire il suo dolore dal momento che lo consideri un sintomo effettivamente presente. Decidi di chiederle come procede la sua vita a casa. Lei scoppia in lacrime. Poi racconta che le manca la madre e quanto sia difficile prendersi cura di tre figli piccoli senza il suo aiuto.

Pensando a questa donna, ti viene in mente come sia comune per i pazienti presentare un disturbo mentale con dei sintomi fisici, soprattutto se pensano che i medici di famiglia siano solo interessanti alla salute del corpo.

Sei cosciente inoltre che i disturbi di ansia e depressione sono relativamente comuni tra le donne con bambini piccoli, ma consideri che il problema principale di questa signora possa essere la reazione conseguente alla morte della madre. Le chiedi con discrezione se abbia avuto pensieri di farsi del male, ma lei ti assicura di no perché i suoi bambini hanno bisogno di lei.

**4. Management:** Family doctors manage people with common mental health problems, and the physical health of people with severe mental health problems

- **(Complexity requires a complex intervention, NOT ONLY DRUGS)**  
*Family doctors apply cognitive, behavioural and psychosocial interventions, e.g. psychoeducation, motivational interviewing, stress management, behavioural activation, problem solving and **mindfulness***
- *Family doctors explain and prescribe antidepressant and anxiolytic medication, consistent with **evidence-based** guidelines*



## Management of physical health conditions in adults with severe mental disorders

WHO GUIDELINES



### Overview

Preventable physical health conditions lead to premature mortality in people with severe mental disorders, reducing their life span by 10-20 years. The majority of these premature deaths are due to physical health conditions.

[http://www.who.int/mental\\_health/evidence/guidelines\\_physical\\_health\\_and\\_severe\\_mental\\_disorders/en/](http://www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/guidelines_physical_health_and_severe_mental_disorders/en/)

**5. Collaboration and Referral:** Family doctors are aware of a range of available options and resources for care of people with mental health problems, and tailor them to their patients' and carers' needs.

- Family doctors **involve** the patient, the patient's family and the social network as a resource for patient care
- Family doctors involve the **wider primary care team**, e.g. nurses, case managers and psychological therapists, as resources for patient care
- ➔ • Family doctors share the care of patients with severe or complex mental health problems with **specialist mental health services**

**6. Reflective practice:**

**Family doctors take care of their own health and well-being**

- *Family doctors know the **limits** of their own knowledge and skills*
- *Family doctors **nurture and nourish their own mental health.***

**New amendment to Hippocratic Oath** ratified In Chicago (USA) at the Annual General Assembly of the World Medical Association in October 2017:



Dr. Sam Hazledine

**I WILL ATTEND TO my own health, well-being, and abilities in order to provide care of the highest standard.**

<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2658261>

Humor is an  
antidote to all ills!  
Patch Adams

