



How to improve the management of depression?: contributions of qualitative research with patients, caregivers and professionals

Yolanda Triñanes¹ Gerardo Atienza¹ Antonio Rial-Boubeta² Marisa López-García¹ Elena de-las-Heras-Liñero³

1. Galician Agency for Health Technology Assessment (avalia-t), Santiago de Compostela, Spain; 2. University of Santiago de Compostela, Santiago de Compostela, Spain; 3. Galician Health Service, Vigo, Spain



avalia-t
Agencia de Evaluación de
Tecnologías Sanitarias de Galicia

Background and aims

There is growing consensus on the importance of taking into account the **needs, preferences and experiences of patients** in Clinical Practice Guidelines (CPG). On the other hand, the **view of the professionals** involved can provide information that is complementary to that which is obtained by patients about illnesses and the health care experience. Although there are different ways to incorporate this information, one of them is through **evidence obtained from qualitative research**.

As part of the CPG on the Management of Depression in Adults, a **systematic review** of qualitative studies and an **empirical study based on focus groups** with patients, families and professionals was conducted.

Our **aim** is to provide a summary of the main contributions of this qualitative approach to the health care process.

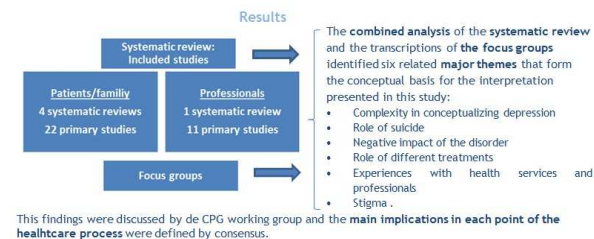
Methodology

Systematic review: we included studies whose main purpose was to analyse experiences and attitudes toward depression and/or its clinical management.

- **Methodological quality:** CASP checklist (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme), and following the proposal of Goldsmith et al (Q++;Q+,Q-).
- **Thematic synthesis of the data:** analyses the recurring themes or issues in the primary literature and draws conclusions. The purpose of this method is to develop analytical themes through a descriptive synthesis and find relevant explanations to a particular review question.

Qualitative study: 4 focus groups were conducted (2 with patients, 1 with caregivers, and 1 with health care professionals). Each group consisted of 8 participants and the duration of each session was approximately 2 hours.

- **Recruitment:** cooperation of the working group who developed the CPG on the Management of Depression in Adults and the main patient association of Spain (Federation of the Families and People with Mental Illness, FEAFES).
- **Data generation technique:** to allow the transcription and analysis of information, the sessions were tape recorded, with the approval of the participants who signed a consent form, guaranteeing the confidentiality of the information. To try to provide the objectivity to the results achieved, a double triangulation strategy was used: both for data and researchers.
- **Ethical considerations:** the study was approved by the Galician Ethics Committee for Clinical Research (CEIC).



Implications for clinical practice derived from themes
<p>Entrance to the health system</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The way patients understand depression are critical for its detection and clinical management. • It is necessary to establish a physician-patient empathetic and open relationship based on collaboration. • Stigma has a negative impact on the experience of depression, so professionals should take notice and help to normalize it.
<p>Assessment and diagnosis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suicidal ideation is recognized as part of the most common symptoms, so it should always be addressed in the evaluation. • It is especially important to provide information about depression and possible therapeutic strategies at this point.
<p>Treatment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The preferences and needs of the patient should be taken into account and therapeutic alternatives made available. • Patients beliefs and the benefits attributed to each treatment type are of vital importance in the adherence and effectiveness of it.
<p>Follow-up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It should be desirable, to encourage adequate monitoring in order to assess the impact of depression in all its dimensions. • Support should be provided to both patients and their family.

Conclusions

- The management of depression requires for the implementation of additional measures to enable the **improvement and optimization** of clinical practice.
- It is necessary to develop an approach to the clinical management of depression that allows both detection and subsequent treatment and monitoring from a **perspective that integrates the patient's needs and demands**.
- The **incorporation of qualitative** research to the CPG is **crucial** to improve the management of depression health care process.

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