

Evaluation of care provided for depressive and anxiety disorders

2019



Mental health problems continue to increase, especially among children and young people. More people are receiving care and treatment but despite this, the queues are growing. There are shortcomings and major regional differences within both the care provided to children and young people and to adults. This is evident in the National Board of Health and Welfare's evaluation of care provided for depressive and anxiety disorders, which is based on the national guidelines in the area.

What are depressive and anxiety disorders?

Depressive and anxiety disorders are widespread diseases and affect people of all ages. More than one in three women and close to one in four men suffer from depression at some point in their life. A quarter of the population is affected by an anxiety disorder at some stage. Many of these people are of working age, which means that these diagnoses, together with adaptation difficulties and reaction to severe stress, give rise to just over 40 per cent of all sick leave.

More young people are treated for depressive and anxiety disorders

The evaluation shows that the number of children and young people being treated within the psychiatry services has increased over the past ten years. As a consequence, the prescription of antidepressants has also increased, although the proportion being treated with medication has not changed.

Mental disorders are often persistent

Mental disorders tend to be persistent in nature. 30 per cent of young people who were diagnosed with a depressive or an anxiety disorder in 2008 were still in need of psychiatric care ten years later. Just over half were treated with medication.

The results also show that young people, who are diagnosed early on with a depressive or an anxiety disorder, find it more difficult to establish themselves in their working and adult life. Ten years after their diagnosis, almost one in four individuals were not engaged in the labour market or were dependent on financial assistance.

Early intervention needs to be developed

The increase in mental disorders among children and young people places great demands on paediatric and adolescent psychiatric services, but also on student health services, guidance centres for young people, and other areas of primary care.

The evaluation indicates a need for the continued expansion of psychiatric primary care for children and young people. There are great disparities in the organisation of first line health care across the country. There are obvious shortcomings identified in many areas.

Waiting times are long, and in order to reduce these, staff with relevant skills are needed. Therefore, supplying staff for the future is a vital issue.

Shortcomings also identified in the care of adults

There are also shortcomings identified in the care provided to adults. A quick and accurate diagnosis is a prerequisite for good care and the diagnostic process needs to be improved. More services should use structured assessment tools, conduct somatic examinations, and identify any potential addiction problems in conjunction with a diagnosis. The results indicate that access to psychological treatment is unevenly distributed across the country and that needs are not uniformly being met.

Several areas in need of improvement

- Identifying symptoms of somatic symptom disorder
- Identifying and treating addiction problems
- More active suicide prevention work
- Continuing the development of psycho-pedagogical interventions
- Increasing access to psychological treatment
- Reducing the prescription of benzodiazepines
- Increasing the support provided to relatives
- Better data sources to be able to monitor the area.

What are national guidelines and evaluations?

National guidelines and evaluations consist of recommendations, indicators, target levels and evaluations. They are primarily aimed at decision makers and the management of health services at all levels, but they can also be of benefit to professionals, patient associations and the media. The evaluations show the extent to which the regions work in accordance with the recommendations in the guidelines, and indicate what needs to be improved.

In 2017, the National Board of Health and Welfare revised the national guidelines concerning care provided for depressive and anxiety disorders. In conjunction with this, the associated indicators and target levels were also revised.

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More information on the evaluation is available on the National Board of Health and Welfare's website, www.socialstyrelsen.se.