

P03-526

THE DISCHARGE OF PATIENTS WITH ENDURING MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS INTO PRIMARY CARE: PATIENTS' PREFERENCES AND VIEWS

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Objectives: To investigate the preferences of psychiatric patients regarding attendance for their continued mental health care once stable from a primary care setting as opposed to a specialized psychiatric service setting.

Methods: 150 consecutive psychiatric patients attending outpatient review in a community mental health centre in Dublin were approached and asked to complete a semi-structured questionnaire designed to assess the objectives of the study.

Results: 145 patients completed the questionnaire giving a response rate of 97%. The majority of patients had a general practitioner (GP, 132, 94.3%) and most attended their GP every 3 months (68, 48.6%). Ninety-eight patients (70.0%) preferred attending a specialized psychiatry service even when stabilised on their treatment. The common reason was fear of substandard quality of psychiatric care from their GPs (68.4%), followed by inability to afford a GP appointment (23, 23.5%) and not having a GP (9, 9.2%). Thirty two patients (22.9%) preferred to attend their GP. Reasons for this included confidence in GPs providing same level of care as psychiatrist for mental illness (18, 56.3%), the advantage of managing both mental and physical health by GPs (13, 40.6%) and less stigma (28.1%).

Conclusion: Although most patients attended their GP more frequently than the psychiatry clinic, they preferred attending specialized psychiatric services once mentally stable than primary care with most reasons revolving around fears of inadequate psychiatric care from GPs.