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MENTAL HEALTH OF OLDER PEOPLE: THE ROLE OF PRIMARY CARE

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There are currently over 600 million people aged over 60 and it is predicted that, by 2025, the number will double and, by 2050 there will be over 2 billion people aged 60 and above and the number of over 60's will be greater than the number of children under the age of 15. Co-morbid physical and mental health conditions are associated with an aging population and many of this population will suffer from stroke, hypertension, loneliness, depression, dementia, mobility and sight problems. The traditional approach of caring for people in hospitals is increasingly inappropriate for many of the elderly population and primary care is often the first point of contact for many people seeking access to health and social care. In 2008, the WHO and Wonca (World Organisation of Family Doctors) published a document about the integration of mental health into primary care across spectrum. We will be describing the principles and method of integration of mental health problems in old age into primary care using examples from the Australian and UK setting. Also we will examine the role non-governmental organisations can play in the process of integration. Caring for the elderly is rewarding and possible in the primary care setting. The current situation where many elderly people do not have access to an integrated health care system is unacceptable. Using data and a series of case vignettes we will illustrate that primary care has an important role to play within an integrated system.