Diverse voices, simple desires: a conceptual design for primary care to respond to depression and related disorders

Victoria Palmera,*, Jane Gunnã, Renata Kokanovicã, Frances Griffithsb, Bradley Shrimptonã, Rosalind Hurworthã, Helen Herrmand, Caroline Johnsonã, Kelsey Hegartyã, Grant Blashkiã, Ella Butlerã, Kate Johnston-Ata-ataã and Christopher Dowrickñ

ãDepartment of General Practice, The University of Melbourne, 200 Berkeley Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053, Australia, bCentre for Primary Health Care Studies, Warwick Medical School, University of Warwick, Coventry, UK, cCenter for Program Evaluation, Melbourne Graduate Education School, The University of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, dCenter for Youth Mental Health, The University of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, eNossal Institute of Global Health, The University of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia and fDepartment of Primary Care, University of Liverpool, Liverpool, UK and Department of General Practice, The University of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

*Correspondence to Victoria Palmer, Department of General Practice, The University of Melbourne, 200 Berkeley Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053, Australia; E-mail: vpalmer@unimelb.edu.au

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Background. The World Health Organization and the World Organization of Family Doctors have called for ‘doable’ and ‘limited’ tasks to integrate mental health into primary care. Little information is provided about tasks GPs can undertake outside of guidelines that suggest to prescribe medication and refer to specialists.

Objectives. The reorder study aimed to gather diverse patient and community perspectives to inform the development of an effective system of depression care.

Method. Five hundred and seventy-six patients completed computer-assisted telephone interviews. Two hundred and seventy-six community stakeholders completed a modified two round Delphi. Responses were analysed to identify tasks and these were synthesised into a conceptual design.

Results. Fifteen core tasks were identified, 5 were agreed upon and a further 10 identified by each group but not agreed upon. Listen, understand and empathize, provide thorough and competent diagnosis and management, follow-up and monitor patients, be accessible and do not rush appointments and provide holistic approach and tailor care to individual needs were agreed on. Other tasks included: develop plans with patients, assess for severity and suicide risk, account for social factors, be well trained in depression care and offer a range of treatment options, appropriate and timely referral, support and reassurance, educate patients about depression, prescribe appropriately and manage medication and be positive and encouraging.

Conclusions. The tasks form the basis of a conceptual design for developing a primary care response to depression. They fit within three domains of care: the relational, competency and systems domains. This illustrates tasks for GPs beyond prescription and referral.

Keywords. Depression, doctor–patient relationship, health service management, mental health, qualitative research.

Background

The World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Organization of Family Doctors (WONCA) have called for action to integrate mental health care into primary care. The 10 principles listed by WHO and WONCA include identifying primary care tasks that are ‘limited’ and ‘double’ (see Box 1). Identification of GPs and primary care ‘tasks’ for depression treatment and management is not entirely clear. Guidelines provide...
There is increasing recognition that depression care is complex. Yet, tasks within guidelines usually amount to no more than prescribe antidepressant medications and refer to specialists. The collaborative care model suggests screening and case management by other non-GP professionals but this has been costly in the USA and definitive results are awaited from UK and European trials. The identification of depression care tasks is complicated by the spectrum of depression seen. Indeed, in primary care, depression rarely reflects the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (DSM-IV-TR) (DSW) categories and is often a combination of depression, stress and life worries. Debate remains around when the label of depression should be applied and whether ‘depression’ is a useful diagnostic label for general practice.

The aim of the reorder study (reorganizing care for depression and related disorders in the Australian primary health care setting) was to identify the tasks that GPs and primary care should be equipped with to deliver depression care. During 2006 and 2007, reorder undertook consultations with patients, academics, government, non-government organizations and health professionals. Our aim was to identify diverse perspectives on what GPs and primary care should do for depression. While there have been a number of studies to gather patient and stakeholder views about what is important in depression care, none have been to the scale of the reorder consultations reported on in this paper.

### Method

#### Sample

Results presented in this paper are based on in-depth consultations held with patients in Victoria, Australia, and community stakeholders (henceforth referred to as ‘stakeholders’) from Australia wide including some international representatives. Each consultation phase was conducted separately and is described below.

#### Patient perspectives

Patients were identified from an existing longitudinal study, the ‘diamond’ study (the diagnosis, management and outcomes of depression in general practice). Diamond is a cohort of primary care patients who scored ≥ 16 (indicating probable depression) on the Centre for Epidemiological Depression Scale at baseline.

#### Community stakeholder perspectives

Community stakeholders were identified using complexity theory and the social determinants of health framework. Researchers (JG, CD, FG, HH, KH, RK, GB, CJ and EB) participated in a 2-day workshop facilitated by RH to determine the sampling frame. Representatives were sought from federal, state and local governments in Australia, the non-government sector, the health sector and academics in Australia and internationally, including those engaged in primary care and broader research issues like migration, social inequalities and concepts of health and illness. Adequate representation was sought across aspects of the depression experience such as economic issues, work, poverty, disability, access to education, technology, history of local communities, roles of families and friends, relationship issues, the use of health care services, biology of depression, the health care consultation, health care professional attitudes and training, access to services and the organization of health care systems (all parts of the social determinants of health framework). Organizations, groups and individuals were identified by websites and publicly available directories and then contacted by email. Two hundred and ninety three participants were identified for each group of the stakeholder consultation.

#### Data collection

**Patient perspectives.** Patients completed computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI) between March 2006 and April 2007 12 months after joining the cohort study. The structured interview guide consisted of 14 sections, 5 sections formed part of the reorder consultation. There were 54 questions, 41 open and 13 closed questions, and three open-ended questions are reported on in this paper (see Box 2). Interview questions included all three terms depression, stress and worries to capture the spectrum of depression seen in general practice. Interviews were 1 hour in length on average and trained interviewers typed responses verbatim and
collated these within NVivo 7. Patients were asked about individual experiences when seeking GP care.

**Community stakeholders.** Questions for stakeholders were piloted by the investigating team and then posed to each stakeholder group. A usual Delphi incorporates smaller numbers of experts with three rounds for ranking, this consultation was a modified Delphi process because numbers were large and two rounds occurred. Table 1 presents results from patients and stakeholders. Their review found that responses fell within two categories of tasks. These categories reflect the questions participants responded to (see Box 2). The tasks were seen to refer to three important domains of health care: the ‘relational’, ‘competency’ and ‘systems’ domains. Tasks explaining the relational domain referred to the more qualitative and subjective aspects of the consultation, the tacit aspects of the doctor–patient relationship and in particular values like trust, empathy and compassion. Tasks in the competency domain were oriented towards technical aspects of care, the skills, education, competencies and techniques needed to deliver care. The systems domain tasks identified organizational changes and infrastructure support required for effective depression care. Patients and stakeholders provided responses that identified tasks within all three domains across both categories of what is required and how could the system be assessed. The three domains provide the foundations of a conceptual design to inform a primary care response to depression.

### Data analysis

**Patient perspectives.** Patient responses to the questions were read by members of the multidisciplinary research team (academic general practice, sociology, anthropology, psychology, psychiatry and health promotion). Team discussions about assigning codes and meanings were held (RK, EB, JG, FG, HH and CJ) and 20 responses to individual questions were coded by individual members of the team to ensure consistency. Frequently repeated themes were grouped within agreed upon broader categories. A list of the 10 most mentioned themes was developed for each question.

**Community stakeholder perspectives.** Content analysis techniques and inter-coder consensus were used to analyse Round 1 data. RH and BS led the process of developing a list of the 20 most frequently mentioned responses. Time emerged as such a common issue that it was excluded in Round 2. Participants were informed of this exclusion. The top 20 list was emailed back to participants in random order and they were asked to rank the 10 most important items for each question (with one being most important) (An additional ranking process was undertaken by BS and RH for the modified Delphi, which sought to identify the top 10 responses across each group. This ranking exercise is not reported on within this paper because figures from the stakeholder’s initial selection of their top 10 responses from the list of 20 have been used to conduct a proportional comparison between the two groups).

**Data synthesis**

VP and JG reviewed the top 10 responses provided by patients and stakeholders. Their review found that responses fell within two categories of tasks. These explain what is required in an effective model of care in the primary care system and how we would determine if the model of care and system was effective. These categories reflect the questions participants responded to (see Box 2). The tasks were seen to refer to three important domains of health care: the ‘relational’, ‘competency’ and ‘systems’ domains. Tasks explaining the relational domain referred to the more qualitative and subjective aspects of the consultation, the tacit aspects of the doctor–patient relationship and in particular values like trust, empathy and compassion. Tasks in the competency domain were oriented towards technical aspects of care, the skills, education, competencies and techniques needed to deliver care. The systems domain tasks identified organizational changes and infrastructure support required for effective depression care. Patients and stakeholders provided responses that identified tasks within all three domains across both categories of what is required and how could the system be assessed. The three domains provide the foundations of a conceptual design to inform a primary care response to depression.

### Results

**Patients**

Five hundred and seventy-six patients completed CATI Question 1, 475 completed CATI Question 2 and 474 completed CATI Question 3 (see Box 2). The 100 missing responses to Questions 2 and 3 were from patients who had not spoken to a GP about their DSW. Table 1 details patient characteristics.

**Stakeholders**

Three hundred and thirteen stakeholders participated in Round 1 (32.9% response rate) and 276 in Round 2 (31.5% response rate). Table 2 details participant characteristics from Round 2 of the modified Delphi for which the top 10 tasks are reported.

Table 3 presents results from patients and stakeholders combined. It is important to bear in mind that each group volunteered responses: no tasks were pre-established or set out by the research team. Fifteen tasks are identified by patients and stakeholders for effective depression care. Five are agreed upon and an additional ten are mentioned by each group but not agreed upon. Agreed-upon tasks include: ‘listening, understanding and empathy,’ ‘competent and thorough

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**Box 2 Questions asked for patient and community stakeholder consultation**

| **Patient CATI Questions** |
|-----------------------------|
| (1) What do you think are the most important tasks that GPs can do for people experiencing depression, stress or worries? |
| (2) Thinking of the times you have spoken to a GP about depression, stress or worries, what was good about this? |
| (3) Thinking of the times you have spoken to a GP about depression, stress or worries, what could have been done better? |

| **Community Stakeholder modified DELPHI Questions** |
|-----------------------------|
| (1) How should general practice/primary care respond to people experiencing depression? |
| (2) What are the barriers for best practice in general practice/primary when faced with people experiencing depression? |
| (3) How would we know if general practice/primary care is meeting the needs of people experiencing depression? |
diagnosis and management,’ ‘following up and monitoring of patients,’ ‘funding longer consultations, having more accessibility to GPs, appointments not being rushed’ and ‘taking an holistic approach and tailoring care to individual needs’. Table 4 provides a selection of patient and stakeholder quotes to further illustrate perspectives on the tasks, the improvements that could be made (perceived barriers) and the tasks completed effectively (including ways to measure these).

Nearly half the patients (44.2%; 210/475) suggest that listening, understanding and being empathetic is done well by their GP, and a smaller proportion (13.1%; 62/474) say GPs could improve this. Over half the stakeholders (64.5%; 178/276) identify that ‘over-reliance on medication’ is a barrier to good listening. Surveying patients is suggested to measure for listening, being understanding and empathetic. Responses highlight that measures need to incorporate the multifactorial nature of care and complexity of patient experiences rather than trying for a ‘one size fits all’ approach. Combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews are ways suggested to capture the patient experience.

Patients and stakeholders also agree that ‘diagnosis and management’ is an important task. Similar proportions of patients (15.8%; 75/475) mention diagnosis and management as a task done well compared to those (14.8%; 70/474) who say it can improve. Nearly half the stakeholders (48.6%; 134/276) link the problem of diagnosis and management with ‘inadequate general practice/primary care competency and training to recognize, assess and treat depression.’ Stakeholders propose ‘measuring diagnosis rates in general practice’ to assess system effectiveness.

A third agreed-upon task is ‘follow-up and monitoring’. Relatively small proportions (between 4% and 6% of patients) comment on this as a task done well or as a task to improve. The ‘poor integration between general practice/primary care and other providers’ is a barrier nominated by a large proportion of the stakeholders (70.7%; 195/276). Almost two-thirds of stakeholders (62.0%; 171/276) suggest that ‘monitoring the quality and duration of follow-up’ could measure effectiveness as could ‘monitoring patient recovery’ (56.2%; 155/276) and ‘measuring functional outcomes like the capacity to function physically, socially and in the

FIGURE 1 Illustration of modified Delphi process
community’ (48.6%; 134/276). Functional outcome measures could also be used for ‘assessment of severity and suicide risk’.

Patients and stakeholders agree on the need for longer consultations. More patients (10.1%; 48/474) said that improvements in ‘accessibility and appointments not being rushed’ are needed compared with those (5.5%; 26/475) who said that this is done well. Stakeholders identified the need for funding for longer consultations. Both groups overwhelmingly cite ‘time available’ as a barrier to effective depression care. ‘Measuring patient satisfaction’ could determine improvements in accessibility and time.

The final agreed-upon task is ‘holistic assessment and tailored treatment for individuals’. A moderate proportion of patients (10.5%; 50/475) suggest that this task is done well with a smaller number (6.8%; 32/474) saying this could improve. ‘An overreliance on the medical model’ is a barrier to whole-person care. Stakeholders suggest ‘surveying consumers and carers’ to measure holistic assessment and tailored treatment, as well as ‘surveying patients’.

Results indicate that some additional tasks were nominated more highly than some of the agreed-upon tasks. For example, stakeholders ranked ‘developing a plan with patients’ very highly (76.8%; 212/276), patients supported this but it was not mentioned frequently. Patient results show that ‘appropriate and timely referral’ (30.0%; 173/576) and ‘support and reassurance’ (18.8%; 108/576) are mentioned more often than the agreed-upon task of ‘follow-up and monitoring’. A substantial number of stakeholders (72.1%; 172/276) identify the ‘lack of affordable referral options’ and ‘GP access to referral’ as a barrier to ‘timely and appropriate referral’. Stakeholders mention ‘assessment of severity and suicide risk’, ‘accounting for social factors’, ‘being well trained in depression care’ and ‘offering a range of treatment options’ more often than ‘funding longer consultations’. The final three tasks patients identify

Discrepancies in total due to missing responses. CES-D, Centre for Epidemiological Depression Scale.

*If ever in an adult intimate relationship.

Table 2 Stakeholder characteristics

| Setting          | Occupation                  | Government | NGO | Academic | Health professionals | Unspecified | Total |
|------------------|-----------------------------|------------|-----|----------|----------------------|-------------|-------|
| Government policy advisor | 25                          | 2          | 1   | 0        | 0                    | 0           | 28    |
| Academic         | 2                           | 1          | 55  | 0        | 1                    | 0           | 59    |
| CEO/Director/Manager | 17                          | 30         | 2   | 14       | 2                    | 2           | 65    |
| Research officer/project | 1                           | 7          | 1   | 4        | 1                    | 1           | 20    |
| GP               | 0                           | 0          | 0   | 15       | 0                    | 0           | 15    |
| Psychiatrist     | 0                           | 0          | 0   | 11       | 0                    | 0           | 11    |
| Psychologist     | 0                           | 0          | 0   | 13       | 0                    | 0           | 13    |
| Nurse            | 0                           | 0          | 0   | 16       | 0                    | 0           | 16    |
| Counsellor       | 0                           | 0          | 0   | 4        | 0                    | 0           | 4     |
| Social worker    | 0                           | 0          | 0   | 7        | 0                    | 0           | 7     |
| Consumer/carer representative | 0                           | 9          | 0   | 0        | 0                    | 0           | 9     |
| Other—refer to list | 6                           | 9          | 2   | 7        | 1                    | 25          | 34    |
| Total            | 51                          | 59         | 67  | 92       | 7                    | 276         |      |

NGO, non-government organizations; COE, chief executive officer.
are to ‘educate patients about depression’ (10.4%; 60/576), ‘prescribe appropriately and manage medication’ (7.1%; 41/576) and ‘be positive and encouraging’ (4.4%; 25/576). ‘Lack of knowledge about depression within general practice/primary care’ and ‘negative community attitudes’ are barriers to education and positivity.

Figure 2 represents the synthesis of the 15 identified tasks outlined for GPs and primary to respond to depression this includes tasks that could be undertaken to measure effectiveness or demonstrate a reduction in the barriers. These are presented within the two categories of ‘what is required to develop an effective model and system of depression care’ (upper section) and ‘how would we determine if the model of care and system were effective’ (lower section). Figure 2 is a conceptual design to inform a primary care response to depression and related disorders.

Discussion

The reorder consultations were deliberately broad to capture diverse voices yet the results show simple desires. Patients and stakeholders overwhelmingly agree on the tasks required for an effective model and system of depression care and time undoubtedly underpins all these tasks. Patients and stakeholders show most agreement on tasks within the relational and competency domains in terms of what is required to develop an effective model of care (see Fig. 2). The doable tasks for GPs within the relational domain are listening, understanding, empathy, support, reassurance, whole-person care, involvement of patients in planning, positivity and encouragement. The doable tasks identified within the competency domain are to undertake a thorough diagnosis and management of depression, develop a plan with patients, undertake an assessment of

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### Table 3 Patient and stakeholder responsesa

| Tasks identified for GPs | Tasks identified for primary care | Examples of tasks done well by GPsb | Tasks affected by barriers to best practicec | Examples of tasks that could be improvedb | Task to measure for system effectivenessd |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| **Patients** N = 576    | **Stakeholders** N = 276         | **Patients** N = 475                 | **Stakeholders** N = 276                   | **Patients** N = 474                  | **Stakeholders** N = 276                 |
| Listen, understand and empathizee | 215 (37.3) | 174 (63.1) | 210 (44.2) | 189 (68.5) | 62 (13.1) | 201 (72.8) |
| Diagnose and manage     | 177 (30.7) | 181 (65.6) | 75 (15.8)  | 134 (48.6) | 70 (14.8)  | 144 (52.2) |
| Follow-up and monitor1  | 89 (15.5)  | 185 (67.0) | 19 (4.0)   | 195 (70.7) | 30 (6.3)   | 162 (58.7) |
| Fund longer consultations | 87 (15.1)  | 119 (43.1) | 26 (5.5)   | 48 (10.1)  | 171 (62.0) |
| (accessibility and not rushing) |          |            |            |            |            |            |
| Holistic approach and tailoring | 76 (13.2)  | 168 (60.9) | 50 (10.5)  | 178 (64.5) | 32 (6.8)   | 158 (57.2) |
| Non-agreed-upon additional tasks |          |            |            |            |            |            |
| Develop a plan with patients | 212 (76.8) |            |            |            |            |            |
| Assessment of severity and suicide risk | 163 (59.1) |            |            |            |            |            |
| Account for social factors | 156 (56.5) |            |            |            |            |            |
| Be well trained in depression care | 151 (54.7) |            |            |            |            |            |
| Offer range of treatment options | 149 (54.0) |            |            |            |            |            |
| Appropriate and timely referrald | 173 (30.0) | 53 (11.1)  | 194 (70.3) | 49 (10.3)  | 133 (48.2) |
| Support and reassurance | 108 (18.8) | 100 (21.1) | 16 (3.4)   |            |            |            |
| Educate patients about depression | 60 (10.4)  | 44 (9.3)   | 108 (39.1) | 13 (2.8)   |            |            |
| Prescribe appropriately and manage medication | 41 (7.1)   | 53 (11.2)  | 41 (8.6)   |            |            |            |
| Be positive and encouraging | 25 (4.4)   |            |            |            | 147 (53.3) |

aAll results were volunteered by each group. Patient results show the 10 commonly mentioned and coded themes to open–ended questions. Stakeholder results show figures from ranking 10 most important items from the original list of 20 items.
bNine tasks are reported for tasks done well and tasks to improve as ‘nothing’ was coded as the 10th task. We have not included ‘nothing’ in these results.
cThe barriers to best practice identified by stakeholders have been corresponded with the task that would be most affected the barrier reported on in the results summary.
dThe ‘ways to know if primary care is meeting patient needs’ have been corresponded with the task that could be measured to identify effective depression care reported on in the results summary.
eStakeholders identified ‘listening’ and ‘empathy’ separately as important in the initial top ten list. The figure presented here is for ‘listen’: 39.9% (110/276) stakeholders nominated empathy separately as important.
fOver half of the stakeholders (56.2%; 155/276) suggest ‘monitoring patient recovery’ is also important to measure for effective follow-up and monitoring.
gOver half of the stakeholders (54.7%; 151/276) also nominated ‘patients not having timely access to services’ as a barrier.
**Table 4**  Patient and stakeholder quotes for the conceptual design of an effective system of depression care

| The five agreed-upon tasks for depression care | Tasks to improve for increased effectiveness of depression care—the barriers to tasks | Tasks done effectively—how to measure for effectiveness |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| **Listen, understand and empathize**          | Listening and believing because I felt like they were waiting for me to shut up so they could give me a prescription (Patient). I think that he could have listened more or paid more interest in what may have been causing it. He was just happy to prescribe medication and brush it off. More clinical rather than caring (Patient). There is a dominance of drug therapy as first choice of treatment; this is a panacea not a treatment (Stakeholder). There is a lack of confidence in managing psychological symptoms. GPs are familiar with drug treatments rather than alternative supports and may prescribe medication as a first line of action knowing they do not have the time or resources to consider alternatives (Stakeholder). |
| **Diagnose and manage (thoroughly and competently)** | More time to get diagnosed properly the first time, not the second or the third! Not so much guessing, but trying to really find the problem (Patient). They could probably talk about it a bit more, probably try and get more detail from you about what was causing it before they just referred you on to other professionals (Patient). Earlier diagnosis, like probably it was 4 or 5 months until I was properly diagnosed I guess (Patient). The experience or training levels of GPs [is not adequate] to cover this issue (Stakeholder). There is a lack of diagnostic skill regarding depression, especially with non-typical presentations (Stakeholders). There appears to be a view that GP’s are skilled to diagnose and treat all manner of afflictions – they are not, especially not those issues that have an emotional/ psychological/social base (Stakeholder). |
| **Competent diagnosis and management—measure diagnosis rates** | I think it’s the fact that the issue was able to be diagnosed, because I’d seen different doctors … just knowing what was wrong (Patient). The GP tended to wanted to get to the root cause and to do something positive to make a change, you know make it better. I’ve found psychologists and psychiatrists don’t have the personal sort of touch that the GP has (Patient). Ultimate outcome measure = number of people screened and managed for pre-depression symptoms increases whilst number of people diagnosed and treated with clinical depression decreases (prevention versus treatment) (Stakeholder). Earlier diagnosis and lower incidence of severe problems (Stakeholder). Increased rates of diagnosis of illness (Stakeholder). |
| The five agreed-upon tasks for depression care | Tasks to improve for increased effectiveness of depression care—the barriers to tasks | Tasks done effectively—how to measure for effectiveness |
|---|---|---|
| Follow-up and monitor | Improve follow-up and monitoring—poor integration between general practice/primary care and other providers | Following up and monitoring—monitor duration and quality of follow-up, patient recovery and functional outcomes |
| Also to follow up and say comeback and chat for 5 minutes to see how you’re getting along and even ring them, and even if the doctor is too busy, maybe like you said before have a nurse that can perform the follow up to take some of the load off the doctor (Patient). Regular check up and monitoring of medication and other interventions provided (Stakeholder). Monitoring and proactive follow up (Stakeholder). Ensure there are follow up opportunities to monitor progress (Stakeholder). | I think sometimes the referrals can be done better. I think sometimes they refer you to services that are unrealistic, financially and time wise (Patient). Probably a better follow up on treatment advice. They put me on medication but didn’t follow up. It was left up to me (which I suppose was right, I don’t know), but there was no follow up on whether the medication was making you feel better or not, um, it wasn’t “come back and see me in a week or if you’re not feeling better.” You were just given the script and that was it (Patient). Depression often needs a multidisciplinary approach, not just a GP to treat (Stakeholder). Negative attitudes by some GPs towards delegating patient education, brief interventions and follow-up of patients to practice nurses. Similar negative attitudes towards the creation of new roles in general practice, e.g. medical assistants (Stakeholder). | To give them time and understanding, compassion, and like refer them on to someone who can help them further. And a follow up call from your doctor would mean a lot actually (Patient). More effective systems established for follow up & management (Stakeholder—quality and duration of follow up). Need methods for following up on care plans (Stakeholder—quality and duration of follow up). Measure timelines - from onset to assessment, from assessment to treatment, from treatment to recovery (Stakeholder—monitor patient recovery). Evaluate the treatment the consumer or patient receives at the local level, e.g. are Cognitive Behavior Therapy interventions impacting on functioning (Stakeholder—measure functional outcomes). |
| Fund longer consultations (accessibility and appointments not being rushed) | Improve accessibility and consultations length—time | Accessibility, appointments not being rushed—measure patient satisfaction |
| I think consulting times becomes an issue. You know, in and out. Here you are coming in with stress and worries and you have to be in and out in 20 minutes. And cost. You’re there because things are crumbling around you but you have to be out in 20 minutes. It’s a paradox. And I think cost, you have to pay for it (Patient). Have time to talk to [patients]. I know some of them have certain time limits and they have to get through a certain amount of people in an hour and no one wants to be told that, “that is enough time for today”, you don’t want to feel rushed and people might clam up again (Patient). Make time available for “longer” consultations to discuss problem once identified (Stakeholder). Provide long consultation for a proper assessment (Stakeholder). | I suppose they were supportive to some extent and tried to listen but you always felt that they were watching the clock and their waiting room is full and all the rest of it (Patient). I think they don’t have much time and to sort of, to start off they should listen and advise and not rush through the appointment. A lot of people may go away and think that he didn’t have much time for me (Patient). He is always in a hurry you don’t really, I mean he asks you but you don’t really feel like you have time and he is always interjecting to try and hurry you up (Patient). The GP appointment system usually 10 minute turn around in most GP practices does not facilitate an environment whereby people can discuss in any depth issues related to feelings of depression (Stakeholder). Lack of time to talk with patients in an unhurried fashion (Stakeholder). Feedback from our patients indicates that GPs are often too hurried and don’t have time to listen (Stakeholder). | Well he listens, he’s never in a hurry to get you out of the office, he talks to you, he asks you questions. He’s very caring, not only with me, but all his patients (Patient). That he made the time. He’s the only one I trust and his receptionists were ordered to give me an appointment even when they were busy (Patient). He’s very thorough and makes sure that I’m very well informed about what I’m getting into and about what’s causing the depression and anxiety, and so my appointments with him often take a while (Patient). We need accepted outcome measures/clinical indicators – both for improvement over a period of time, and in relation to each individual session. These need to give centrality to the client/patient’s views about what they wish to get out of the care (Stakeholder). Research projects to investigate patient satisfaction (people with depression) with their GP’s (Stakeholder). |
The five agreed-upon tasks for depression care

- Holistic approach and tailoring care to individual needs
- Improve holistic approach and tailored care—an overreliance on a medical model
- Holistic approach and tailored care—survey carers and consumer groups

Tasks to improve for increased effectiveness of depression care—the barriers to tasks

| I think they need to treat people as a whole and if there’s some emotional type thing if they can’t handle, they should have a collection of other health care people that they can refer to—but they should have a collection because its different strokes for different folks so you need a range that you can be referred to (Patient). Assessing and attending to the psychological and social as well as biomedical needs of people experiencing depression (Stakeholder). Take a holistic approach and also look at family (Stakeholder). Engage with as a whole person (i.e. holistic), not as a set of symptoms (Stakeholder). They should make a holistic assessment, i.e. before reverting immediately to medication, assess what environmental (e.g. family, work, lifestyle, family violence) factors are involved in the depression that need to be addressed (Stakeholder). |
|---|
| I guess with some of them they should spend more time and not just straight away give you a referral and a prescription. Just go through the history and that kind of thing (Patient). The patient may think that medication may be enough to help them to recovery/relapse prevention (Stakeholder). Use a social model of health not just a medical model (Stakeholder). Focussing only on a traditional approach and not holistic (Stakeholder). Constrained capacity to move beyond biomedical model of health (Stakeholder). Many medical students pick up an attitude in medical schools that biomedical subjects are far more important than ones in the social and behavioural sciences (Stakeholder). |
| It depends on the GP. I’ve had a few. When its good is when they’ll go through your history and talk to you and look for patterns and talk about ways to control it (Patient). They pointed me in some directions, some relaxation techniques, making time for myself and getting away from whatever was causing me stress (Patient). Community survey to identify who is depressed and then ask those people about their experience in primary care (Stakeholder). Consumer satisfaction (Stakeholder). Consult carer and consumer groups (Stakeholder). Better techniques for evaluation, including qualitative assessment of consumer outcomes (Stakeholder). |

Tasks done effectively—how to measure for effectiveness

- improve holistic approach and tailored care—an overreliance on a medical model
- Holistic approach and tailored care—survey carers and consumer groups

**Table 4** Continued

"Surveying carer and consumer groups could also include surveying patients, quotes for how to survey patients have already been provided earlier in the table."
dimensions. Establishing how to give equal weight to both the relational and competency domains is fundamental to developing an effective model and system of care as our results demonstrate. This is particularly the case as patients and stakeholders have identified that both the relational tasks like listening are as important as competent and thorough diagnosis in depression care.

Strengths and limitations

One strength of this study is the diversity of viewpoints integrated in the conceptual design including non-medically trained and non-health professionals. While qualitative studies have previously elicited patient perspectives, none that we are aware of have been to the scale of these consultations and few have synthesized both patient and stakeholder perspectives. Given that Delphi response rates are known to be low, our response rate to the modified Delphi is reasonable due to our large numbers and diverse participants.

A potential limitation to our analysis is the use of mixed methods for data collection for each group. Our view, however, is that the responses from both groups assist to identify some very doable tasks for primary care beyond the limited tasks within current depression care guidelines. Additional limitations include that the patient cohort is predominantly female, from English-speaking backgrounds, well educated and in employment. These demographics undoubtedly play a role in how this group conceive depression and its treatment and management. Future research with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and those for whom access to health services may be difficult will be essential to determine the relevance of this conceptual design for their depression care.

Existing literature suggests GP care emphasizes the relational domains (human connection, accessibility, supportiveness and empathy) over technical or mechanical approaches where the focus is on checking technicalities of illness. In keeping with Osler’s work, medicine needs science but this cannot replace the Hippocratic tradition of working with people. Listening is central to human connection but needs to be also understood as critical to diagnosis and monitoring of patients. Empathy too enhances the doctor and patient relationship, yet can improve both patient and doctor satisfaction and diagnostic accuracy. Previous research has found that patient confidence in clinical competence increases with an increased perception of receiving quality of care. This further highlights the interconnection between the three domains. While concerns have been raised that good listening and regular review and monitoring of patients increases GP workload in a time-limited setting, these tasks are obviously fundamental to patients and stakeholders for mental health care. Addressing the barrier of time is critical to depression care patients should not be worried about taking up GP time with unnecessary or insignificant concerns like DSW.
Conclusions

This study has identified a wider range of doable tasks for GPs than to simply ‘prescribe’ and ‘refer’. There is opportunity now for GPs and policy makers to consider how to operationalize these at an education and practice level. A key challenge is how to incorporate fundamental relational tasks within everyday practice limited by time and for this to be valued by a system heavily weighted in the direction of mechanical competency. While this paper has focussed on principle four of the WHO and WONCA call for integration of mental health into primary care, there are other tasks that patients and stakeholders support, which are covered in the 10 principles.

This study illustrates that patients and stakeholders value the tasks that occur largely within the relational domain, but it is clear that they want this to be combined with technically competent care. The problem in an evidence-based world is that competency often trumps the relational and tacit dimensions because of its measurability and increasingly competency is being presented as a mechanistic deliverable achieved through ticking check boxes. The relational is far more difficult to measure and as a result is undervalued and sidelined in government policy documents. Our greatest challenge for integrating mental health into primary care is to ensure that designs for an effective model and system of care give equal weight to the relational and competency domains. These domains need to be supported by a clearly articulated systems domain suited to each local context. This will require considered attention to identify the appropriate ways to measure all of the tasks required for depression care but particularly the relational tasks.

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Contributors: RH, EB, BS, JG, RK and CJ were responsible for identifying stakeholders for consultation. RK oversaw the CATI 2 data collection and analysis. RH and BS were responsible for the coordination of the modified Delphi. HH, CD, FG, KH, CJ and GB assisted in design of questions, data analysis and synthesis with EB, JG and RK. KJA assisted in the analyses of CATI responses. VP and JG developed the conceptual design for a model of depression care suitable for the primary care setting. All listed authors have contributed to the writing, analysis and synthesis of this paper and approved the final version.

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Author/s:
Palmer, V; Gunn, J; Kokanovic, R; Griffiths, F; Shrimpton, B; Hurworth, R; Herrman, H; Johnson, C; Hegarty, K; Blashki, G; Butler, E; Johnston-Ata'ata, K; Dowrick, C

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