

# Editorial

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## Background

In recent years there has been increased concern for controlling costs worldwide and increasing requests for information on the best return for individuals, groups and society from the financial resources allocated to health research, care, and rehabilitation. This suggests the need for evaluation of priorities between illnesses, specialties and interventions.

Medical specialties, including psychiatry, need to develop informed policies based on the special aspects of the illnesses they manage and on the values and utilities of the medical and social interventions they use. Therefore, each specialty is expected to evaluate and defend the value of its interventions compared with those in other specialties and with those in other resourced social utilities (for example, education, defence, food, housing, transportation).

These activities are particularly important in psychiatry: the traditional assessment of health status in populations on the basis of mortality, coupled with the stigma historically attached to them, has probably under-rated the social impact of mental disorders.

## Interaction Between Disciplines

In the past, the relationship between clinical, epidemiological and economic research, as well as its proper use by health policies, has not often been interactively developed.

For many years research on the management of mental illnesses was separately developed in psychiatric journals, journals of health economics and journals of public health with only very sporadic interactions. The consequence was that the scientific discussion of mental health economics is sparse in journals of psychiatry, economics and public health, or appears in administrative publications of limited distribution. New research findings were frequently unknown to psychiatrists, health economists or public health researchers because they were published beyond the range of journals related to their specialty. Decision makers were frequently unable to find comprehensive and consistent research information and use it properly.

The need for understanding the economic factors refers not only to the development of large health strategies and policies: it is also becoming more and more important in the everyday decisions of specialty physicians in many countries regarding the cost/effectiveness of different interventions (e.g. individual drugs) and their reimbursability, the liberty of judgement of the clinician on the treatment addressed to the individual patient, and the role of ethics in the practical application of cost containment strategies.

These are issues for which research is equipped to analyse, and specialty physicians, both researchers and practitioners, need to become familiar with the research and the 'language' in order to address properly the needs of the mental health field and spread the information in society on the benefits of the mental health interventions for individuals, groups and society.

## Development of an Interdisciplinary Scientific Field

A growing number of excellent research papers have been produced in this field during the last decade and national and international editorial activities have enabled the spread of scientific research information.

More and more psychiatrists in the different countries are introducing economic variables in methodological research, epidemiological studies, and clinical trials. The number of health economists involved in the evaluation of the interventions in the mental health sector is also growing rapidly. The establishment of governmental programs in some countries aimed at financing health services and health economics research in mental health, stimulated the development of this field. The Mental Health Economics Research Program (MHERP) of the US National Institute of Mental Health plans, stimulates, supports and conducts policy-oriented scientific research on the role of economic factors in the delivery, accessibility and use of mental health services. Objectives of the program are to promote the growth of scientific knowledge and assist in the development of improved mental health care financing. Biennial economic conferences sponsored by MHERP have been held since 1979. The conferences are attended by health economists and public health researchers. Papers presented and discussed at these meetings have been published in refereed journals and in one book<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>. The Personal Social Services Research Unit (PSSRU) and the Centre for the Economics of Mental Health at the University of Psychiatry (CEMH), University of London, have developed a newsletter: *The Mental Health Research Review*, a source of up-to-date information on mental health economics research activities in UK.

The World Bank—WHO project<sup>5</sup> to evaluate the social burden of the individual medical illnesses and the cost/effectiveness of various interventions was a pioneering intergovernmental effort of stimulating interdisciplinary research in mental health.

The research has also been fueled by the increasing requirement for economic studies of the reimbursement of psychiatric interventions due to the establishment of new rules for selecting priorities developed by some public administrations.

Activities aimed at the international integration of research

performed by different disciplines that in the past separately evaluated the mental health field from different perspectives have been performed by the Association for Research into Costs and Assessment in Psychiatry (ARCAP) since 1990 with the co-sponsorship of the World Health Organization and the World Psychiatric Association. These activities resulted in the organization of biennial workshops at world (Venice, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1997) and regional level (Budapest, 1997). It enabled psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists, health economists, public health researchers, statisticians who came from academies, administrations, hospitals, both from the public and the private sectors to approach the integration of health and economic evaluation and the issues of their use in decision making. Research findings were published in international psychiatric journals<sup>6,7,8</sup> as well as the integration of the methodological aspects of the different disciplines<sup>9</sup>.

The need for the different participants in the mental health sector to actively and properly intervene in the health care reform debate encouraged the development of this new Journal, which is aimed at stimulating high quality interdisciplinary research and at creating a forum for debating the mental health sector needs.

## The Journal's Aims and Scope

*The Journal of Mental Health Policy and Economics* is an international journal aimed at publishing health and economic research for the evaluation of the interventions in the mental health sector. Disorders such as schizophrenia, mood disorders, anxiety, personality disorders, alcohol and drug addiction, dementias and mental retardation will be considered. The integration of the health and economic methods and measures and their use in determining health policy will be encouraged and the Journal will publish results of high quality empirical research.

A major aim is to assist decision making by different participants in the health care system (psychiatrists and other mental health professionals, administrators and officials, advocacy groups, providers of profit and no-profit health services, providers of health technologies and insurance products) by enabling them to share a common language and easily available results of relevant research. The aim of the Journal is to provide to all of them information on the health and economic consequences of interventions and their implications for mental health and global health policies.

The Journal aims to become the international point of reference for scientific research studies in this interdisciplinary field and a useful tool for decision making for all the participants in the mental health sector. The interdisciplinarity of the journal will require that each article will be reviewed by referees of different disciplines in order to consider separately clinical and economic methods and results, and their proper integration, as well as the implications of the results for decision making. Particular attention will be given to the international applicability of the research, describing in detail the health system and the health services considered, in order to encourage the replication of the study in other environments. Multi-site national and

international studies will be particularly welcomed. The Journal will consider abstracts translated into other languages. From this first issue the abstracts are translated into Russian and are available on the Wiley Internet site.

The studies published in this first issue consider the health and economic consequences of different financing options for severe mental disorders (Bloom *et al.*), the differences between alternative treatments approaches for dementia (Holmes and Teresi) and the relationship between substance abuse treatments and healthcare use and costs (Holder). Two studies address the issue of the economic evaluation of drug treatment. Stewart provides a literature review on the modelling approaches used for comparing different drugs for depression (TCA and SSRI) and Drummond *et al.* discuss the key design issues of a prospective randomised trial to assess the socioeconomic impacts of a new antipsychotic drug.

In consideration of the attention of the Journal to the different perspectives of the mental health sector, a *Debate Section* will contain an article by an internationally recognised expert on issues that the author will consider of particular interest in shaping mental health policy and its relationships with economic issues. From the third issue there will be a *Letters to Editors* section. These sections of the journal are expected to stimulate a lively interaction between different perspectives in the mental health sector and to represent a valuable feed-back for the editorial board, referees, authors, and publisher.

The competitive access to the financial resources for mental health research, prevention, care and rehabilitation means that interested parties rely on reliable, accurate, ready to use research data and the Journal will be aimed at assisting the participants in the mental health sector to develop and improve during time the scientific base for actively and properly participating in this competitive arena.

We are grateful to John Wiley & Sons, in particular Deborah Reece, for their attention to the needs of the mental health sector and encouragements to develop the mission and scope of this Journal. We have a strong commitment to publish high quality papers and we believe that you as readers will contribute to the success of the Journal.

## References

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