

# Mental Health Literacy in Singapore: A Comparative Survey of Psychiatrists and Primary Health Professionals

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## Abstract

**Objectives:** To assess the beliefs amongst health professionals in Singapore about management of 3 major mental disorders, comparing psychiatrists and a sample of primary care physicians, and so identify target areas for the education of primary health professionals. **Materials and Method:** A questionnaire earlier distributed to psychiatrists at Woodbridge Hospital was posted to both Singapore general practitioners and polyclinic doctors. The questionnaire assessed the capacity of respondents to identify vignettes of depression, schizophrenia or mania, and then assessed respondents' views about the likely helpfulness of a number of interventions. **Results:** The psychiatrists and primary health professionals differed little in terms of diagnostic accuracy for depression and schizophrenia; however, only half the general practitioners and three-quarters of the polyclinic doctors correctly diagnosed mania, which was consistently diagnosed by the psychiatrists. A number of distinct differences were identified between the groups concerning the likely helpfulness and disorder specificity of various psychotropic drugs. The primary health physicians were more likely to favour non-specific management approaches, whilst the psychiatrists generally supported a focused biological approach to treatment, especially for the psychotic disorders. Some of the differences in beliefs about mental health management may well be contributed by the different patients treated by each group of clinicians. **Conclusions:** The findings have important clinical implications in terms of diagnosing common psychiatric conditions accurately and giving us professionals' views about a range of interventions for such conditions, while also assisting review of educational programmes for identifying and managing major mental disorders.

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**Key words:** *Depression, Mania, Mental health surveys, Schizophrenia*

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