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HOME VISIT IN MENTAL HEALTH CARE: THE "ITALIAN WAY"

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Introduction: Home visits are an essential component of community mental health care for their potentials in prevention and rehabilitative interventions. In the tradition of the Italian organisation, home visits are commonly carried out by psychiatric nurses, usually case managers for patients receiving them. Poor training and scarce integration to other clinical activities are common problems addressed by mental health professionals.

Methods: A written survey on attitudes, beliefs and reality of home visiting was submitted to all 95 mental health professionals working in the community mental health centres of the Modena District, North of Italy. The survey included the following sections: general information (including seniority of service); personal experience and emotions; description of "what actually happens"; opinions on training; comparison between reality and ideals.

Results: Ninety-eight percent of contacted professionals responded to the questionnaire. Home visiting should be improved and better integrated according to 55% of respondents. Good integration with social services but poor planning and lack of periodical assessments of effectiveness were emphasized by respondents. Seniority of service was significantly associated to different opinions on aim ($p = .043$) and numbers of home visits ($p = .02$) as well as the specific mental health centre was strongly associated to different perceptions on quantitative load of home visits ($p < .0001$). Almost no perception of danger was addressed by respondents, particularly if older.

Conclusions: Home visit is a powerful tool for assertive community treatments in psychiatry and should be a focus for training and research.