

## Old Age Psychiatric Clinic Ten Years of Service

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** Old Age Psychiatric Clinic was founded in Alexandroupolis Hospital since 2009. It was the first specialized clinic in the Psychiatric Department of Alexandroupolis and also the first Old Age Clinic in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace region.

**Material and Methods:** 280 patients were assessed with the following battery, Mini Mental State Examination (MMSE), Mini Cog, Mini Plus tests, Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS), Semantic and Verbal fluency tests and clock test. In this study we present the retrospective evaluation of demographic data diagnosis and overall course of the main disorders of clinic's outpatients. Paired t-test was used for the comparisons.

**Results:** Patients main age was 74, 65 years (SD 7, 62) of them 75% were women. The main population that is served comes from Evros prefecture (80%); the two main diagnoses were Depression (44%) and Dementia (41%). Patients were followed up with every four months. Depressive patients seemed to respond better to the treatment and they improved significantly through time, it was measured in nine consecutive visits in a time span of around four years of follow up, that is clear in the decline of GDS score (middle right diagram) while their overall cognitive function remained stable. Patients suffering from dementia performed worse and although their cognitive function was decreasing in a relative slow pace, their depressive symptoms persisted (bottom right diagram).

**Conclusions:** Old age psychiatry clinic is a well-established clinic in Alexandroupolis hospital after ten years of continuous service. Its performance is quite satisfactory regarding old age depression, which accounts to almost half of clinics outpatients but is moderate regarding patients suffering from dementia. The routinely use of psychometry and its research work is also among the characteristics that help this clinic to approach its goals despite its shortcomings.

**Keywords:** Old Age, Service, Alexandroupolis, Dementia, Depression

JEL classifications: I00 General

## Introduction

Old Age Psychiatric Clinic was founded in Alexandroupolis Hospital since 2009. It was the first specialized clinic in the Psychiatric Department of Alexandroupolis, the first Old Age Clinic in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace region and also the first outside Athens or Thessaloniki regions.

From its founding this clinic was following certain principals. One of the most important was that it was using the procedures, regarding referrals and appointments and the infrastructure regarding the personnel and office spaces of the regular outpatients clinic of the hospital. This was due to two reasons. Firstly this was among the requirements set by the hospital administration in order to allow the operation of the clinic and second we assumed that this could make clinics operation more sustainable.

Clinic was operating one day per month and its staff consisted from one specialized Old age Psychiatrist, one psychiatric trainee and one nurse.

## Material and Methods

More than 280 patients from all parts of the region have been followed up in regular visits during the last ten years.

Detailed history is kept for every patient in Hospital's database. A wide battery of bedside scales that measure cognitive functioning and overall mental health and functioning are performed in each patient in each visit also. This battery includes Mini Mental State Examination (MMSE), Mini Cog, Mini Plus tests, Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS), Semantic and Verbal fluency tests and clock test. In this study we present the retrospective evaluation of demographic data diagnosis and overall course of the main disorders of clinic's outpatients. Paired t-test was used for the comparisons.

## Results

Patients' main age was 74.65 years (SD 7.62) of them 75% were women. Its mean follow up time is 36 months while the average number of visits is 3. The main population that is served comes from Evros prefecture (80%). The two main diagnoses were Depression (44%) and Dementia (41%). (Picture 1) Patients were followed up with approximately every four months. Depressive patients seemed to respond better to the treatment and they improved significantly through time. They were assessed in nine consecutive visits in a time span of around four years of follow up, that is clear in the decline of GDS score (Table 1) while their overall cognitive function remained stable. Patients suffering from dementia performed worse and although their cognitive function was decreasing in a relative slow pace, their depressive symptoms persisted as it was shown in a similar assessment. (table2)

Picture 1: Percentage of patients' diagnosis in old age clinic

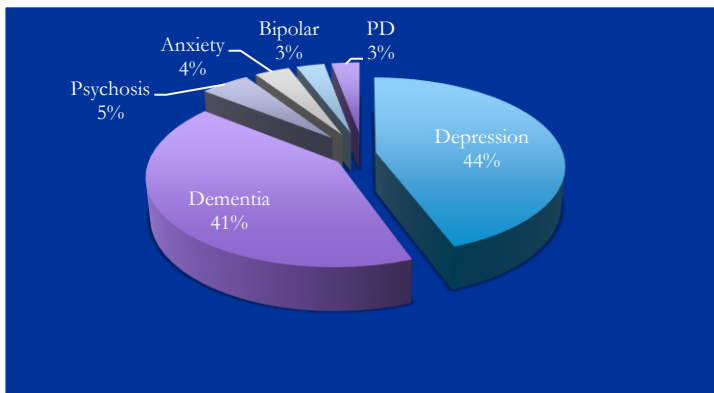


Table 1: Course of depression and cognitive function of depressive patients through time as was recorded by GDS and MMSE respectively

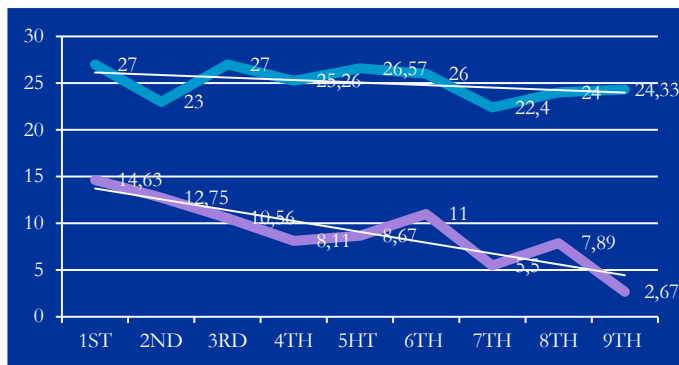
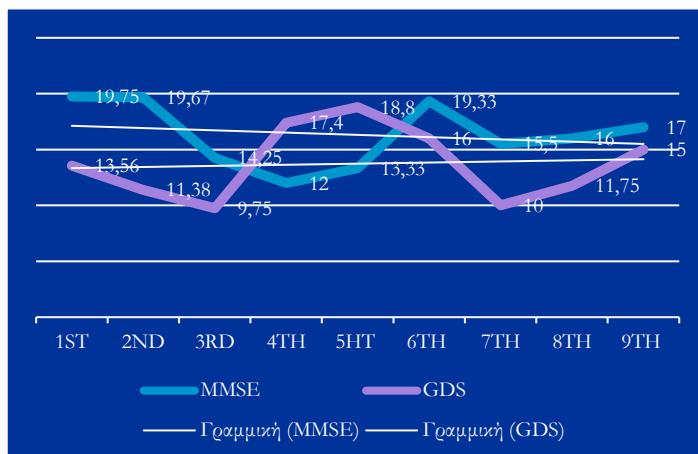


Table 2: Course of depression and cognitive function of patients diagnosed with dementia through time as was recorded by GDS and MMSE respectively



## Discussion

Old age psychiatry clinic is a well-established clinic in Alexandroupolis hospital after ten years of continuous service. This can be considered as a success since it managed to function relatively smoothly despite the harsh financial conditions, especially for the national health system, during these years. This success is in a great extent the result of initial principles of its operation so we can say that despite the modest beginnings of this clinic its resilience and ability to adapt to the changing circumstances makes us happy and proud.

Furthermore during the last three years this clinic saw other changes also. Today all the new trainees of the department, which are psychiatry, neurology, or general practitioner (GP) trainees are trained for a period between three and six months in the clinic. Special care was given to GP training that they are trained according to their logbook. Students are much more embodied to clinics functioning and during their training they are trained in clinics bedside psychometric tests and also help with clinic statistic and research work.

Clinic is also much more flexible and it can be performed, mainly due its standardize work for each patient and the amount of trainees, both doctors and students, that are constantly present every week increasing its flexibility and improving patients services very much.

During its operation more than 25 specialized doctors are trained in the clinic. One of them a specialized Psychiatrist now applied to begin its own Old Age clinic in Lamia General Hospital in Central Greece. Furthermore a few of the General practitioners that are trained in the clinic work in regional Health Centers and improve the quality and quantity of the referrals to the clinic.

Despite that during this time clinic was not be to cover more of the region as it was aimed to, since the vast majority of the outpatients comes from Evros Prefecture. One of the great hurdles is clinics placement, which make it hard to be reached from the other regions. A program regarding these problems is to be initiated with the help of the above-mentioned General Practitioners first to evaluate and then to face and solve this problem.

Despite this, clinics performance is quite satisfactory regarding old age depression, which accounts to almost half of clinics outpatients but is moderate regarding patients suffering from dementia. This is more or less expected regarding the nature of these diseases. (Voigt-Radolf, 2004) We believe though that at least we manage to keep patients suffering from depression as much healthy as we can cognitively and emotionally (Mitchell, 2005) Regarding people with dementia we believe that we manage to keep them relatively stable regarding their depression and in a decent pace of cognitive decline. (Sacuiu, 2016)

Research work is also among the characteristics that help this clinic to approach its goals. Clinics' psychometric approach and also the detailed history recording allowed the clinic to increase its research and publishing presence. This makes it to fulfill not only its training but also its research role.

Research work in the form of audits, of the clinic are regularly announced in conferences some in international ones also (Vorvolakos 2006). Furthermore clinics database and research attitude allowed it to get and stay in touch with other old age clinics. At present clinic is in touch and shares data in a common data base with similar clinics in Athens, Thessaloniki, Larissa, Arta and Patra. One of the first ongoing works of this collaboration is the

standardization in Greek languages of Mini Cog (Bronson 2000) and Mini Plus (Sheehan 1998) bedside cognitive tests.

Furthermore the above mentioned clinic network is in touch with other similar clinics throughout Southern Balkan Region (Alexopoulos 2020)

## Conclusions

Old Age Psychiatric clinic of Alexandroupolis can look at its second decade with optimism. During the last ten years it managed to establish its self as a known regional specialized Clinic. The aims for the future are mainly to deepen its collaboration with other clinics in Greece but also in Southern Balkan region, to help new Old Age Clinics to emerge since such clinics are still scarce in Greece and finally to extend its reach much more in the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace. This is hoped to be achieved through collaboration with Primary Care Settings.

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