

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Recommends Screening for Anxiety



The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF), a panel of disease prevention and medical experts whose recommendations help guide doctors' decisions, have proposed that screening for anxiety should become available for adults under the age of 65.

According to the draft recommendation for anxiety, the lifetime prevalence of anxiety disorders in the U.S. stands at 26% for men and 40% for women; this is a very common mental health concern that requires more attention.

Lori Pbert, a clinical psychologist and professor at the University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School, added that it should become a prioritised action, "because of its public health importance, especially with the increased focus on mental health in this country that we've been having for the past few years".

Brief screening tools such as questionnaires and scales have been developed for both anxiety and depression, and are already available for use in primary care. If screening results show any signs of anxiety then additional confirmatory assessments are undertaken.

However, there are missed opportunities within primary care practice, and it is imperative that a method is found to ensure unrecognised signs or symptoms are not missed. Therefore, it is recommended to screen all adults who have not been screened before. In addition, clinicians must consider underlying health conditions and life events to decide on whether additional screening is needed for high-risk individuals.

The recommendation would apply to adults over the age of 19 who have not already been diagnosed with a mental health disorder. Adult experiencing symptoms or showing signs of anxiety should be assessed to identify anxiety early, and subsequently be connected to care.

Recommendations for depression and suicide risk screening have already been published. Bringing all the draft recommendations together is an opportunity to support primary care clinicians in addressing mental health in adults.

As Pbert adds, "this set of recommendations (is) as an opportunity to be able to provide clinicians who are working with adult patients comprehensive guidance in terms of how to approach screening for anxiety, depression and suicide risk".

Lastly, the task force hope that by raising awareness of mental health issues and the screening opportunities, that all adults, including those who experience disparities, will be able to access these tools and feel supported.

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