



RESEARCH ARTICLE

PROVISION OF MENTAL HEALTH CARE FOR OLDER ADULTS IN STATE OF QATAR, ACHIEVEMENTS & OPPORTUNITIES

Raafat Samir Labib Mishriky¹, Majid Al Abdulla² and Abdul Waheed Khan³

1. Senior Consultant Old Age Psychiatrist, Director of Old Age Psychiatry Fellowship Training Program, Hamad Medical Corporation, State of Qatar.
2. Chairman & Medical Director of Psychiatry, Senior Consultant Psychiatrist, Hamad Medical Corporation, Associate Professor & Director of Psychiatry Clerkship, Qatar University.
3. Associate Consultant Psychiatrist, Hamad Medical Corporation, Qatar.

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Abstract

Older adults' mental health care in Qatar is delivered through Hamad Medical Corporation within the Government sector. Care provision is multidisciplinary including ambulatory outpatients' clinics, community outreach, older adult's liaison, acute inpatients and continuing mental health unit. The review outlines the expansion in mental health care delivery for older adults. It emphasizes the integration of the older population's cultural needs with training future old age psychiatrists. The commodity outlines education and training issues including medicolegal training and Dementia awareness. It crystallizes achievements and future opportunities. This article represents a prime in this journal with focus on Old Age Psychiatry in Qatar.

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Introduction:-

Older adults' mental health care in Qatar is delivered through Hamad Medical Corporation within the Government sector. Care provision is multidisciplinary including ambulatory outpatients' clinics, community outreach, older adult's liaison, acute inpatients and continuing mental health unit. The review outlines the expansion in mental health care delivery for older adults. It emphasizes the integration of the older population's cultural needs with training future old age psychiatrists. The commodity outlines education and training issues including medicolegal training and Dementia awareness. It crystallizes achievements and future opportunities. This article represents a prime in this journal with focus on Old Age Psychiatry in Qatar.

Provision Of Mental Health Care for Older Adults.

The numbers of older adults aged 65 and above in Qatar increased steadily from 32,375 in October 2019 to 37,025 in October 2020 and 38,576 in October 2021¹ Older Adults have further increased from 42,725 in January 2023 to 44,613 in December 2023 and 46,321 in January 2024¹ as shown in Figure (1)

Mental health services in Qatar were established in 1971 and Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC), the government medical provider across the state was established in 1982² Old Age population faces various vulnerabilities including poor mobility, cognitive impairment, polypharmacy & comorbidities. Consequently, accessing care smoothly is

Corresponding Author:- Raafat Samir Labib Mishriky

Address:- Senior Consultant Old Age Psychiatrist, Director of Old Age Psychiatry Fellowship Training Program, Hamad Medical Corporation, State of Qatar.

essential³The old age psychiatry fellowship training program through graduating old age psychiatrists has expanded remarkably the care provision³

Older adults' outpatients and community outreach provide care to west, central, south, and north parts of Qatar. Each community location is led clinically by a consultant or senior consultant supported by a specialized multidisciplinary Team in Older adults' mental health. The expansion of older adults' mental health care was enhanced since October 2021 onwards through integrating the old age increased population and cultural needs as one of the goals of the old age fellowship program³

Qatar is among the foremost regional countries to develop a national Dementia plan with domains of being a public health priority, awareness, friendliness, risk reduction, diagnosis, treatment, carers support, Information systems, research and Innovation⁴

Older Adults Ambulatory Outpatients & Community Outreach Clinics

There has been a remarkable increase in older adults Psychiatry outpatients' clinics within the last three years. This included establishing clinics in primary care since October 2022. Furthermore, there is an increase in community Outreach provision over the same period. Community Outreach are visits for patients who are unable to come to the clinics. In addition, there are memory clinics embraced by the sister department of geriatric medicine with input from geriatric psychiatrists, geriatric physicians and allied health care professionals⁵ Access to care and quality of care across Qatar is monitored through weekly older adults' mental health multidisciplinary team led by senior Old Age Psychiatry consultants and allied health care professionals. This ensures that older patients in Central areas and more rural areas in the state receive the same care standards.

A walk-in mental health clinic is a clinic where patients including older adults and carers can seek care without prior appointment⁶ These clinics are designed for patients across the life span requiring a more urgent assessment, medications reviews, or medical reports. Recent study indicates that 10 % of patients who walk in are older adults or their carers. Walk in clinic in secondary care can be unusual, but it appears to be culturally sensitive and well received in Qatar. Such clinics typically address conditions that are not severe enough to require an emergency department and not routine enough for a standard outpatient or outreach appointment⁶. Consultation in the walk-in clinic may result in a referral to an appropriate service. Walk in Psychiatry clinics in secondary care reduces the pressure on the main outpatients' clinics by providing immediate, and short-term care. The needs of older patients attending such clinics are complex & require a flexible approach through mobilizing various resources & communication with social agencies. Consequently, old age Psychiatry trainees provide regular input in these clinics⁶

Older Adults Mental Health Liaison and Inpatients Care

There is wide variation in old age liaison mental health across countries including Qatar. In peripheral general hospitals, liaison old age psychiatry is provided by adult Psychiatrists with support from a qualified old age psychiatrist⁷

New older adult's liaison psychiatry care was introduced in Hamad General hospital, a central hospital with large numbers of referrals. The total number of patients aged 65 and above or below 65 with Dementia from June 2021 to May 2022 were 125. The number of referrals after the new Liaison service introduced from June 2022 to May 2023 were 95 referrals⁷ The referrals reduced through providing a dedicated old age Liaison service and by education for staff and Patients/families. The new Liaison service transferred the Old Age Liaison model from a consultation model to an Old Age Liaison Provision & Care⁷

Older adults' patients with mental problems using a general hospital must have access to liaison that specializes in diagnosis and management of older people's mental health¹⁰ Royal College of Psychiatrists highlighted that all-age Liaison mental health service encourages the incorrect assumption that services can be staffed by 'all-age' liaison psychiatrists, who manage patients of any age. In the college opinion, this required medical staff to work beyond their competencies resulting in lower quality of care⁸

Inpatient mental health care, excluding liaison, is categorized into acute and continuing mental health care. In October 2023, three acute inpatient wards have been established in a rural southern hospital in Qatar. Acute wards are gender sensitive. One ward exclusively for females and two other wards for males' patients. Wards designs, names, layouts and decorations are mostly Dementia friendly. However, patients less than 65 without dementia can be admitted to acute wards. Consequently, the wards are gender sensitive but are not very age sensitive. Traditionally, patients 65 + are admitted with one-to-one observation routinely to reduce risks and enhance dignity in care.

The older adult's mental health continuing health Care female's unit opened in May 2022, is gender and age sensitive. Monitoring the steady increase of older population in the state & patients centered needs enhanced the continuing health care ward opening. The ward has five beds, and the occupancy rate has been consistently 80% and above since its opening. The ward features a dementia friendly environment through a quiet residential area location. It is designed for older female patients with history of severe mental illness with or without dementia and some challenging behaviors. Patients are mobile, or wheelchair bound. Other medical long term care units are managed by geriatric physicians for older patients who are bedridden on mechanical ventilation and/or tracheostomy⁹

Old Age Psychiatry Training and Education.

Qatar has invested heavily in developing its health care system and achieved parity with developed countries on many health indicators¹⁰ Qatar University opened in 1973, and its medical college was founded in 2015. Weill Cornell Medical College opened in 2004, in addition to its main New York location. The basic Psychiatry training, known as the residency program in Hamad Medical Corporation, was established in 1994. The program is associated with the Arab Board & more recently Qatari Psychiatry Board examinations. Psychiatry residency is a 4-years program, and residents rotate in old age Psychiatry as part of training.

The Old Age Psychiatry Fellowship program is the highest level of training in the specialty in Qatar. The three years program is closely oriented with Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education International (ACGMEI) requirements and considered the first of its kind in old age Psychiatry regionally. The program was formally nominated for ACGMEI accreditation on 1 June 2023 through a formal request to the local education department. The interest rate in Candidates applying for the old age Psychiatry fellowship program is remarkable with four of ten local psychiatry residents in academic year 2024/2025 formally applied to the program, one applicant selected old age fellowship as first choice, two applicants as second choices and the fourth as third choice.

Medico legal training including capacity assessments is ongoing in old age Psychiatry higher training is one of the program objectives. Qatar's Law prohibits discrimination against persons with physical, sensory, intellectual or mental disabilities in employment, education, access to healthcare and other areas¹¹ Qatar ratified the 1991 general assembly resolution of United Nations for Protection of Persons with Mental Illness and improvement of Mental Health Care such as developing guidelines on human rights of persons with mental disorders¹³ Qatar is also guided by recommendations of World Health Organization's Eastern Mediterranean Region in developing comprehensive mental health services.¹¹

Qatar mental health legislation was released in 2016 through Emiri decree following excessive consultations with stakeholders and partners. The Attorney General's Office has authority to order mental health hospital compulsory admission of a disturbed person for 2 weeks. Attorney General's Office has links with local police to assist in admission¹² During the admission period, a psychiatrist report is submitted to the attorney general office with recommendation to extend the period of hospital stay or discharge with after care plans. Training in older adults' capacity assessments is also ongoing for trainees.

Conclusion

Qatar has made significant developments in expanding the mental health care for older adults across various settings. The fellowship training in old age psychiatry enhanced the delivery of care by meeting its established goals through lining the program objectives with the rising older adult's population in Qatar as shown in Figure 1. Despite these advancements, there are ongoing challenges and opportunities. There is an opportunity through recruiting more old age higher trainees to enhance care provision in areas such as old age liaison Psychiatry across the state, inpatients units, and community outreach. The development of age-sensitive acute wards and gender sensitive continuing health care units will be a juncture.

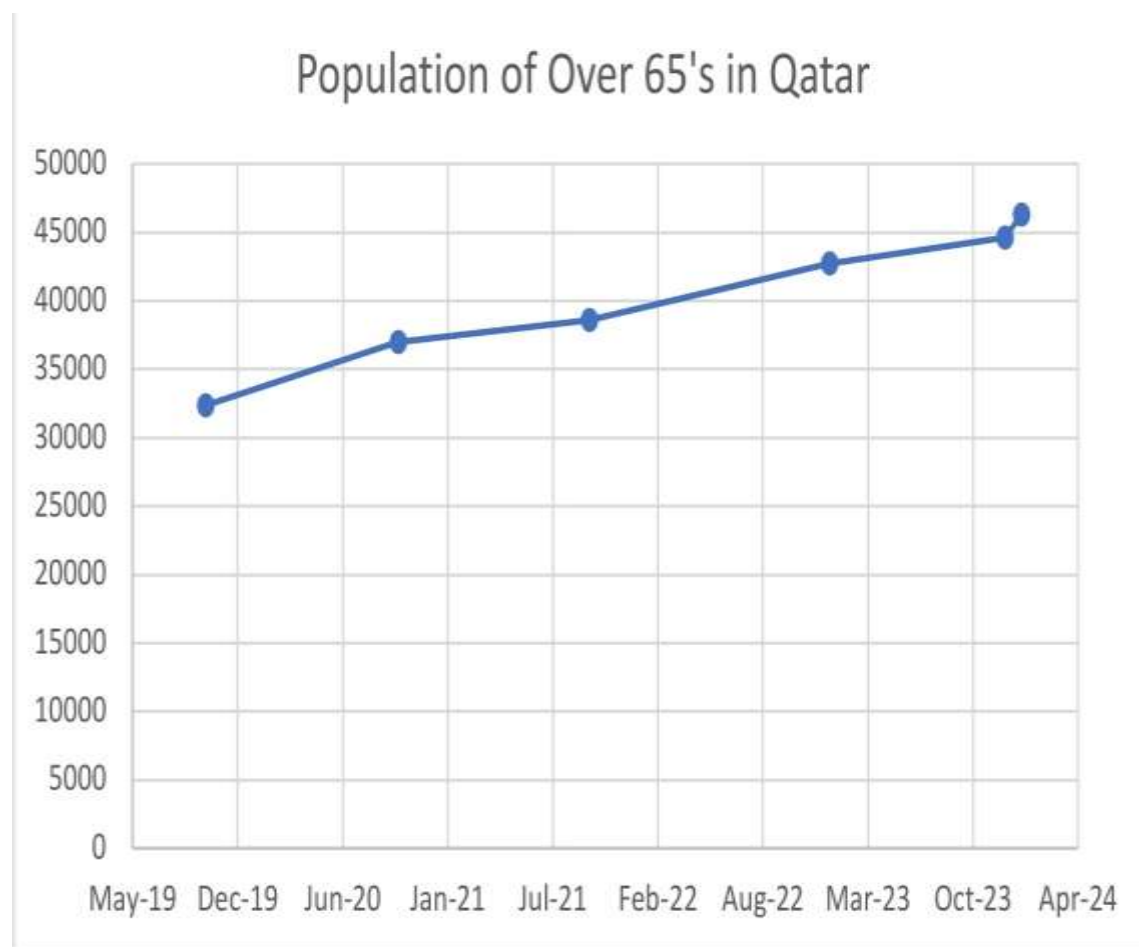


Figure (1) Line Graph showing a steady increase in numbers for age 65+ in Qatar from 2019 to 2024. Designed using publicly accessible data of Qatar monthly statistics¹ by Karim Samir, MSc student in London School of Economics, UK

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Ethics

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Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed to the design of the work and reviewed it critically for important intellectual content and final approval of the version to be published

Declaration of Interest

None

Data and Materials Availability

Data and materials supporting findings are available from the corresponding author upon request.

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