Quaternary prevention, a GP/FM construct based on doctor-patient relationships

From Wonca world Hong Kong 1995 to Wonca APR Taipei 2015

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Traditionally, clinical prevention is conceptualized as a medical activity before or after the occurrence of a condition. Primary prevention is used before any problem arises and encompasses health education and promotion.

The place of secondary prevention is unclear, sometimes used by cardiologists as prevention after an event. Tertiary is not really in use and quaternary has been proposed for palliative care. In this view, the patient is the object of care along time line. The condition is central.

Presented at Hong Kong Wonca World 1995, the 2x2 crosstab model, built on the patient doctor relationships, allows to define four fields of activities in GP/FM including also preventive activities along the time line.

Quaternary prevention is more than a factual activity. It’s a way of thinking about the job which applies in the other fields too (as shown by the arrow), covering such items as overmedicalisation by overinformation, screening, overdiagnosis, overtreatment, as well as avoidable care, protection of the patient and more generally the limits of medical care. Implicitly, patients and populations deprived of care are also in this field which covers undermedicalisation too.

The 3 definitions of Primary, Secondary and Tertiary prevention already published in 1995 in the Wonca glossary of GP/FM fit perfectly in the 2x2 crosstab model.

The definition of the missing field, the fourth one, called Quaternary Prevention, proposed at the Durham WICC meeting has been endorsed by the whole WICC group by standing ovation and edited in the Wonca dictionary of GP/FM in 2003.

A quick growing P4 network
- WICC http://www.ph3.org/p4 Quaternary prevention rubric
- Belgium http://docpatient.net/mj/P4, citations.html
- Bibliography P4 http://www.mendeley.com/groups/1711385/ quaternary-prevention/papers/
- Brazil groups.google.com/forum/1tgprevencuaquaternaria/ gtgprevencuaquaternaria@gmail.com
- Twitter @prevquaternaria www.facebook.com/pages/Prevenci4-Cuaternaria/
- Iran http://earthcitizenhealth.blogspot.com
- Spain SIAP2011@yahooigroups.com
- UK overdiagnosis-group@yahoogroups.com
- Uruguay www.facebook.com/pages/Prevenci4-Cuaternaria/

Main citations
- Available at http://handle.net/22288/20140324/005519
- Jamouli M, Roland M. Quaternary prevention. WICC. Annual workshop Hong Kong-Wonca congress proceedings. 1995