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Accuracy of the PHQ-2 Alone and in Combination With the PHQ-9 for Screening to Detect Major Depression: Systematic Review and Meta-analysis

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This paper set out to estimate the accuracy of the Patient Health Questionnaire-2 (PHQ-2), alone and in combination with the PHQ-9, for screening to detect major depression. The PHQ-9 is a nine-item self-administered questionnaire. The PHQ-2 consists of only the first two items of the longer assessment, and it measures the frequency of depressed mood and anhedonia. The authors aimed to determine whether the PHQ-2 can be used as an efficient first step to identify patients who could benefit from being evaluated with the more comprehensive instrument.

Individual participant data from 100 studies involving more than 44,000 participants, of whom ten-percent had major depression, were obtained and synthesized. The combination of PHQ-2 (with cutoff ≥2) followed by PHQ-9 (with cutoff ≥10) had similar sensitivity, but higher specificity compared with PHQ-9 (with cutoff ≥10) alone. The combination was estimated to reduce the number of participants needing to complete the full PHQ-9 by 57%.

The authors propose that further research is needed to understand the clinical and research value of this combined approach to screening.

This paper is part of the DEPRESsion Screening Data (DEPRESSD) Project (depressd.ca).