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229 Mental health for all – from evidence to engagement: being proactive to mitigate language barriers and to improve equity of mental health care for refugees and migrants

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Aims: Decades of research on the social determinants of health demonstrated significant health inequalities corresponding to social inequalities. We consider here a specific example: the well-documented distinctive vulnerability of refugees and other migrant people to mental health issues, combined with the linguistic and cultural barriers that migrants experience to access mental health services. Barriers to effective communication in mental healthcare are here analysed as a critical social determinant of health inequalities?that could be effectively addressed by turning knowledge into action.

Methods: This analysis paper was developed from the arguments drawn at the joint workshop “Mental health for all – from evidence to engagement”, which took place in March 2023 at the University of Genoa, and by referring to the EU-funded project Mental Health for All (MH4ALL) and the Jean Monnet module SANTÉ

Results: Professional linguistic support emerged as a crucial, unmet, need to facilitate communication. The linguistic mediator has a pivotal role to facilitate and support effective communication between the patient and the mental health staff – this is a vital mechanism for creating a relationship of trust between the two parties, and for the provision of quality services and the appropriate healthcare assistance.

Conclusions: We recommend linguistic mediation as an essential prerequisite for effective communication in mental health care. We conclude by urging healthcare systems to provide effective language services for all users who are proficient in the host country language in mental health care settings, as a way to concretely commit to mitigate health inequalities.