



World Health  
Organization

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In reply please  
refer to:

Your reference:

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Dear Professor Bhugra,

I am writing to thank the World Psychiatric Association for your letter of 3 February 2017 regarding the proposed classification of dementia in the ICD-11. As you know, the previously proposed classification in ICD-11 was for all categories related to dementia to be categorized in the ICD-11 chapter on Diseases of the Nervous System. This was in direct contradiction to the recommendation of the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse related to the classification of these important conditions, which represent the source of substantial disease burden and disability.

Thanks to your message, among many letters we received, this proposal has been changed. The current version of ICD-11 categorizes dementia in the chapter on Mental and Behavioural Disorders. This is the version that has been referred to WHO member states for quality assurance and field testing. (See <http://apps.who.int/classifications/icd11/frozen-2017-04-02>.)

It is necessary that categories related to dementia be fully represented in the ICD-11 chapter on Mental and Behavioural Disorders, as is the case in the current version of ICD-11. We must also recognize that rapid progress in research over recent years has clearly demonstrated that certain nervous system disease processes that underlie dementia can increasingly be identified independently of whether these have manifested in dementia, such as in the case of Alzheimer disease. We expect these trends to continue. The Department believes that underlying nervous system etiologies must be represented in the Diseases of the Nervous System chapter. To do this would necessarily mean a more complex classification structure, but one that would correspond more closely to current clinical and scientific knowledge.

The boundary between the ICD-11 chapters on Mental and Behavioural Disorders and Diseases of the Nervous System is in some respects arbitrary. It must be emphasized that WHO does not consider the different chapters to represent appropriate scope of practice boundaries among different health care disciplines. To interpret the chapters in this way would be a misunderstanding and misuse of the classification.

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The Department will continue its efforts to work with the Classifications Team to maintain a full classification of dementia in the ICD-11 chapter on Mental and Behavioural Disorders as well as to classify relevant nervous system etiologies in the chapter on Diseases of the Nervous System. We will do our best to keep your organization informed of further changes in this regard.

Once again, thank you for your support of the work of the WHO Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, and for your enormous efforts on behalf of people whose lives are affected by dementia and other neurocognitive conditions.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Shekhar Saxena  
Director  
Department of Mental Health and  
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