

MaineHealth

Learning Community

The GAD-7 is a simple, valid tool for assessing Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Generalized anxiety is one of the most common mental health disorders seen in primary care. Patients with GAD, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, have persistent, excessive, and uncontrolled worry and anxiety about daily life and routine activities. Diagnosis, using the DSM-IV, is based on all of the following:

- Excessive and uncontrolled anxiety and worry - more days than not for 6 months
- At least 3 of the following symptoms:
 - ✓ Restlessness
 - ✓ Irritability
 - ✓ Sleep disturbances
 - ✓ Fatigue
 - ✓ Difficulty concentrating
 - ✓ Muscle tension
- Anxiety, worry, or physical symptoms that cause clinically significant distress or functional impairment
- Symptoms that are not the result of substance or medication use or abuse, or a general medical condition

The **GAD -7** can assess for anxiety similar to the PHQ-9 for depression, including use of the first 2 questions as a screening tool. The **GAD-7** can be administered by a clinician or completed by the patient. The responses to the seven questions are constructed on a 3-point scale from "Not at all" to "Nearly every day" and the survey is scored on a 0 to 21 point scale. A score of 5-9 indicates mild anxiety, 10-14 indicates moderate anxiety, and 15 or more indicates severe anxiety.

The **GAD-7** was studied with a total of 2,740 patients in 2004 to 2005 in 15 primary care sites in the United States and was determined to have good reliability, validity and the ability to assess severity of anxiety symptoms in the patients surveyed.¹ Eighty-nine percent (89%) of patients with GAD (as determined by interviews with mental health professionals) had a **GAD-7** score of 10 or greater and the **GAD-7** severity score was correlated with worsening Health-Related Quality of Life scores. The **GAD-7**, like the PHQ-9, may be useful in assessing symptom severity and monitoring changes over time, though the responsiveness to change over time remains to be tested in treatment studies.

For a copy of the **GAD-7**, please [click on the link located within the E-newsletter](#).

1. Spitzer RL, Kroenke K, Williams JBW, Lowe B. A Brief Measure for Assessing Generalized Anxiety Disorder, *Arch Intern Med*. 2006;166:1092-1097.