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AGE GROUP DIFFERENCES IN PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL SETTINGS IN ONTARIO:  
EVIDENCE BASED ON THE INTERRAI MENTAL HEALTH (MH)

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Although the clinical characteristics of persons in mental health settings are likely to vary in relation to a number of different, age is often considered to be one of the primary factors associated with the strengths, preferences and needs of psychiatric patients. The present study employs data from the mandated use of the interRAI Mental Health (MH) assessment instruments as part of normal clinical practice in Ontario psychiatric hospitals/units. The interRAI MH is a comprehensive assessment tool designed to support care plan development and outcome measurement at the person level, as well as quality monitoring and resource allocation at the organizational level. A sample of 27,530 Ontario psychiatric inpatients aged 18+ was examined with respect to socio-demographic, clinical, patient safety and service utilization characteristics. Younger and middle aged persons were compared with a subsample of 3,219 adults aged 65 years or more, including 112 nonagenarians. Although there were a number of notable differences across age groups, there were substantial variations within the elderly population when considering source of admission. Elderly patients admitted from the general community were often relatively comparable to their younger counterparts; however, those admitted from nursing homes were a distinctive subgroup from both younger and older patients admitted from the community. This suggests that age alone is rather limited in its utility for describing mental health populations and more comprehensive clinically based measures should be employed to fully understand the needs and experiences of older adults in psychiatric settings.