

# "Our guide through a difficult terrain" In memory of Henk Lamberts

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**Abstract** Henk Lamberts was an influential academic and leading classification expert who co-authored the International Classification of Primary Care (ICPC). He died on December 29, 2008, aged 68. This poster pays tribute to his life as a leading researcher and his legacy for primary care and classifications.

## Introduction

Henk Lamberts was born on 13 July 1940 in Rotterdam, a month after the invasion of the Netherlands. His father was a solo general practitioner and member of the Dutch resistance who subsequently became a Labour member of parliament.

Henk Lamberts himself became a regional councillor in Rijnmond in 1963, two years before his graduation from the Medical School of Rotterdam, and subsequently city councillor in Rotterdam. He went on to found the Ommoord Health Centre and group practice in Rotterdam, an important and innovative centre of primary care and family practice.

Here he created one of the first multi-disciplinary primary care teams in Europe. Henk Lamberts left Rotterdam for the University of Amsterdam in 1984, where he remained professor and chairman for more than 10 years. Then he became a full time research professor until his retirement in 2005.

His written legacy to the world of general practice includes three text-books and hundreds of articles. He received several prestigious prizes and awards for his innovations and research in family medicine: he was honorary member of the Dutch College of General Practitioners, member of the US Institute of Medicine, recipient of the Maurice Wood award of the North American Primary Care Research Group in 2005, and he was made honorary fellow of the World Organization of Family Doctors (WONCA) in 2007.

## Henk Lamberts contribution & legacy for primary care & classifications

His work in community oriented primary care, which he started in Ommoord and continued in Amsterdam, required the development of a new analysis tool, a statistically valid classification designed specifically for the clinical, behavioural, and social circumstances of family medicine and incorporating the nature of health-care management for health in the community.

As part of this development activities Henk Lamberts co-authored the:

- International Classification of Health Problems in Primary Care (ICHPPC) published in 1975,
- International Classification of Health Problems in Primary Care (ICHPPC-2) published in 1979,
- International Classification of Health Problems in Primary Care -2- defined. Inclusion criteria for the use of the rubrics of ICHPPC-2-defined, published in 1983
- International Classification of Primary Care (ICPC), published in 1987.



This work Henk Lamberts and his colleagues carried out under the aegis of the World Organization of Family Doctors (WONCA). It was the product of years of effort by a World Health Organization international working party, initially funded by the US National Center for Health Statistics.

Based on the patient's perspective, ICPC uses the reason for encounter as the main ordering principle. Coming from a Family Medicine perspective, Henk Lamberts ensured that ICPC emphasized symptoms and complaint diagnoses, especially at the beginning of episodes of care when more precise diagnoses may be difficult. Such an approach enabled a more longitudinal approach to classification, with appreciation for the interplay of symptoms, diagnoses, and treatment over time.

After publication, subsequent development was ICPC is translated into 22 languages, accepted by the WHO as a member of the family of international classifications for reason for encounter, widely used for the routine collection of data on episodes of care in several countries in primary care settings

Among the projects that Henk Lamberts was passionate about was the classification of mental disorders in primary care. Although the general area of mental disorders is dominated by psychiatrists, Henk Lamberts never shied away from his articulate and well-reasoned arguments that what was appropriate in psychiatry was not necessarily right in primary care.

With sensitivity to the kinds of patients seen in primary care, their presenting complaints, and unique primary care practice parameters, he eloquently described and compared three classification systems for mental disorders in primary care the International Classification of Diseases Primary Care Version (ICD-10-PC), the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual Primary Care Version (DSM-IV-PC), and the International Classification of Primary Care (ICPC).

The ICPC classification approach also helped to provide new insights into the onset and development of mental disorders that could only be appreciated from the primary care patient point of view. Furthermore, Prof. Lamberts' primary care classification insights complemented major epidemiologic findings that showed that primary care is the *de facto* mental health treatment system for mental disorders; thus, primary care physicians need to be integrally involved in understanding and refining classification systems for mental disorders.

Because primary care practitioners treat patients with all disorders, including mental disorders, it is important for them to understand the biological, mental and behavioural as well as social aspects of these disorders. Henk Lamberts was a pioneer in recognizing the integrated bio-psycho-social approach in primary care.

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