World Health Organization

INFORMATION FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

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Information Sheet

The Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, World Health Organization, Geneva, has undertaken several crucial activities in the last few months. This summary highlights some basic information about these activities.

WORLD SUICIDE PREVENTION DAY - 10 SEPTEMBER: SAVING LIVES, RESTORING HOPE

World Suicide Prevention Day, a collaborative activity between WHO and the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP), was successfully launched last year. On 10 September 2004 the second WSPD focused attention on the need for global action.

Suicide is a huge but largely preventable public health problem. According to WHO, there are almost one million suicides every year. Suicides account for nearly half of all violent deaths and carry an economic cost in the billions of dollars. Estimates suggest fatalities could rise to 1.5 million suicides by 2020.

WHO held a special seminar on suicide prevention in Geneva, addressed by Dr Le Galès-Camus; Dr B. Saraceno, Director, WHO Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse; Professor L. Mehlum, President of IASP and Professor at the University of Oslo; Ms Sohini Banerjee, a researcher from Calcutta, India; Mr M. Milton, President of the Switzerland-based International Federation of Telephone Emergency Services (IFOTES), and Reverend Cosette Odier, Chaplain, Centre Hospitalier Universitaire Vaudois.

Suicidal behaviour has a large number of complex underlying causes, including poverty, unemployment, loss of loved ones, arguments, breakdown in relationships and legal or work-related problems. A family history of suicide, as well as alcohol and drug abuse, and childhood abuse, social isolation and some mental disorders including depression and schizophrenia, also play a central role in a large number of suicides. Physical illness and disabling pain can also increase suicide risks.

"It's important to realise that suicide is preventable," says Professor Mehlum, "And that having access to the means of suicide is both an important risk factor and determinant of suicide."

More information:
http://www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/suicide/suicideprevent/

PREVENTING MENTAL DISORDERS AND PROMOTING MENTAL HEALTH IS POSSIBLE, SAYS NEW EVIDENCE RELEASED BY WHO

The two new reports resulting from a 2-year international review were released by Mrs Rosalynn Carter, Honorary Chair of the biennial conference in Auckland, New Zealand, in September 2004. The full texts of the reports, "Promoting Mental Health" and "Prevention of Mental Disorders" are available on our website: http://www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/

Mental and behavioural diseases are a growing problem estimated to affect one out of four people during their lives. The reports reveal that child care, education, work, housing and other sectors, can initiate strategies to enhance the mental health of populations. These strategies can prevent the onset of mental disorders in individuals who are at high risk, the reports say.

"Since mental disorders are responsible for a large and growing part of the total burden of all diseases, and treatment of these disorders has many limitations, prevention is the most effective way to control this escalating problem," says Dr Le Galès-Camus, WHO Assistant Director-General, Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health. "Unfortunately, health professionals and planners are often too preoccupied with the immediate problems of those who have a disease to be able to pay attention to the needs of those who seem to be 'well'. We need to intervene sooner, when people are still on the cusp of having a problem. The reports provide solid evidence for mental health promotion and prevention of mental disorders in our health services."

The evidence was brought together by some of the top researchers working in these areas from developed and developing countries. The reports show, for example, that school-based psychosocial programmes can lead to decreased prevalence of conduct and substance abuse disorders. Timely social and economic support also prevents mental and psychological problems among communities exposed to conflicts and disasters. Early identification of serious mental disorders can result in more effective and complete treatment.

The search for further scientific evidence for effectiveness and cost-effectiveness should not be allowed to become an excuse for non-implementation of urgently needed social and health policies directed towards preventing mental disorders and promoting mental health," says Dr Benedetto Saraceno, WHO Director, Mental Health and Substance Abuse.
ACTIVITIES RELATING TO CHILD MENTAL HEALTH

The World Health Organization with the World Psychiatric Association and the International Association for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Allied Professions are collaborating in the development and implementation of the WPA’s Presidential Programme on Global Child Mental Health. This programme was initiated during the current term of Professor Ahmed Okasha and will culminate in a congress in Cairo, Egypt in September 2005. This is the first time that WPA has highlighted a focussed concern with child and adolescent psychiatric disorders and mental health.

The Programme has three task forces aimed at prevention, awareness and treatment. Each task force will be developing and field testing materials suitable for use in developing countries to increase awareness, demonstrate the potential for preventing certain mental disorders and providing guidance on the treatment of specific disorders that can serve as a model for overall treatment programmes. The task forces have used materials provided by the Department and, in particular, are utilizing materials from the child and adolescent mental health Atlas, the booklet on Caring for Children and Adolescents with Mental Disorders: Setting WHO Directions, and other materials from the Violence and Injury Prevention Department and the School Health Programme.

More information may be obtained at the website http://www.wpa-cairo2005.com

MENTAL HEALTH POLICY AND SERVICE GUIDANCE PACKAGE

The Mental Health Policy and Service Guidance Package consists of a series of interrelated user-friendly modules designed to address a wide range of needs and priorities in policy development and service planning. The topic of each module represents a core aspect of mental health. The modules so far published are listed here after:

Mental Health Context: This introductory module describes the current global context of mental health including the historical context and recent developments in the understanding, treatment, and care of people with mental disorders.

Mental Health Policy, Plans and Programmes: Provides practical steps for developing and implementing policies, plans and programmes.

Planning and Budgeting to Deliver Services for Mental Health: Presents a rational planning model to assess the needs of local populations for mental health care and planning services.

Mental Health Financing: Gives guidance on assessing funding mechanisms, maximizing resource base and making best use of funds to promote mental health reforms.

Advocacy for Mental Health: Draws attention to the importance of advocacy in mental health policy and service development and describes the practical steps to assist ministries of health to support advocacy.

Mental Health Legislation & Human Rights: Provides information for the development and implementation of mental health legislation.

Organization of Services for Mental Health: Describes the current forms of mental health service organization and recommends an optimal mix to organize mental health services.

Quality Improvement for Mental Health: Summarizes the practical steps for the improvement of the quality of mental health care.

Improving Access and Use of Psychotropic Medicines: Gives guidance on improving access to and use of psychotropic medicines. Discusses rational selection of drugs, affordability, sustainable financing and availability of reliable health and supply systems.

Full texts are available under: http://www.who.int/mental_health/policy/

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