

WHO activities in Sri Lanka on mental health assistance following the tsunami disaster (January 2005)

After the tsunami, the President of Sri Lanka requested the Director General of the World Health Organization to provide assistance in the area of mental health.

WHO is providing strong support to the Government of Sri Lanka on psychosocial and mental health issues. Dr Shekhar Saxena and Dr John Mahoney from the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse worked at the WHO country office from 13th to 24th January 2005 to coordinate the WHO mental health response in close collaboration with the SEARO and the WHO country office.

WHO is represented on the Committee for psychosocial and mental health aspects, established by the Ministry of Health. WHO has assisted in the preparation of the National Plan of Action for the Management and Delivery of Psychosocial and Mental Health Services for People Affected by the tsunami. The plan follows the WHO strategy as described in the document *Mental Health in Emergencies*. WHO is assisting the Ministry of Health to develop guidelines for psychosocial and mental health interventions.

WHO has assisted in coordinating the efforts of all professions and agencies to develop an effective and consistent approach for all post-tsunami psychosocial and mental health activities. Within the country, WHO has been able to play a key role in developing consensus between various professional groups - the College of Psychiatrists, College of Pediatrics, College of General Physicians and several government departments and NGOs. WHO has also been able to enhance the working relationship with the Ministry of Health.

WHO has assisted in developing the model, plan and training material for personnel from health and other sectors. With WHO assistance, the concept of a multidisciplinary model of training delivered by a multi-agency group has been tested and accepted. WHO has assisted in training conducted in the affected areas (one session in the South region, Galle and the second in the North East at Batticaloa).

A strategy for strengthening the mental health services for Sri Lanka has been developed in consultation with psychiatrists based in the regions. WHO has developed a psychosocial and mental health component of the Flash Appeal. This mental health component will provide 1.1 million US\$ for immediate services in Sri Lanka.

The team has made a number of recommendations to WHO Sri Lanka to further strengthen WHO's assistance in the area of mental health in Sri Lanka after the tsunami. WHO plans to strengthen the Ministry of Health and WHO country office by funding/recruiting mental health staff.