

ABSTRACT

Health systems around the world face enormous challenges in delivering care and protecting the human rights of people with mental, neurological and substance use disorders. The 9 key messages of the WHO publication *Promoting Mental Health* describes the strategy to achieve positive mental health worldwide. The bottom line is there is no health without mental health. The motivating force for mental health for helping everyone achieve positive mental health must come from everyone – people, policy makers and profession. The press should keep everyone aware too.

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INTRODUCTION

Health systems around the world face enormous challenges in delivering care and protecting the human rights of people with mental, neurological and substance use disorders. The resources available are insufficient, inequitably distributed and inefficiently used. As a result, a large majority of people with these disorders receive no care at all.

This felt need worldwide has spearheaded the development of a WHO report edited by Helen Herrman, Shekhar Saxena, and Rob Moodle that serves as a useful reference to create a paradigm shift, titled *Promotion of Mental Health: Concepts, Evidence and Practice* published in 2005. The publication has 288 pages. There are 9 key messages that together described the strategies in this paradigm shift. Message 1 & 2 define the importance of mental health and the positive mental health definition of all. Message 9 highlights the need to regard mental health as everyone's business.

MESSAGE 1 – THERE IS NO HEALTH WITHOUT MENTAL HEALTH

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as: ... a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

Mental health is clearly an integral part of this definition. The goals and traditions of public health and health promotion can be applied just as usefully in the field of mental health as they have been in heart health, infectious diseases and tobacco control.

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MESSAGE 2 – MENTAL HEALTH IS MORE THAN THE ABSENCE OF MENTAL ILLNESS: IT IS VITAL TO INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES AND SOCIETIES

Mental health is described by WHO as:

... a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.

In this positive sense mental health is the foundation for well-being and effective functioning for an individual and for a community. This core concept of mental health is consistent with its wide and varied interpretation across cultures.

MESSAGE 3 – MENTAL HEALTH IS DETERMINED BY SOCIOECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

Mental health and mental illnesses are determined by multiple and interacting social, psychological and biological factors, just as health and illness in general. The clearest evidence for this relates to the risk of mental illnesses, which in the developed and developing world is associated with indicators of poverty, including low levels of education, and in some studies with poor housing and low income. The greater vulnerability of disadvantaged people in each community to mental illnesses may be explained by such factors as the experience of insecurity and hopelessness, rapid social change, and the risks of violence and physical ill-health.

MESSAGE 4 – MENTAL HEALTH IS LINKED TO BEHAVIOUR

Mental, social and behavioural health problems may interact so as to intensify their effects on behaviour and well-being. Substance abuse, violence, and abuses of women and children on the one hand, and health problems such as heart disease, depression and anxiety on the other, are more prevalent and more difficult to cope with in conditions of high unemployment, low income, limited education, stressful work conditions, gender discrimination, unhealthy lifestyle and human rights violations.

MESSAGE 5 – MENTAL HEALTH CAN BE ENHANCED BY EFFECTIVE PUBLIC HEALTH INTERVENTIONS

The improvement in heart health in several countries has had more to do with attention to environment, tobacco and nutrition policies than with specific medicines or treatment techniques. The malign effects of changing environmental conditions on

heart health have been reversed to varying extents by actions at multiple levels. Similarly, research has shown that mental health can be affected by non-health policies and practices, for example in housing, education and child care. This accentuates the need to assess the effectiveness of policy and practice interventions in diverse health and non-health areas. Despite uncertainties and gaps in the evidence, we know enough about the links between social experience and mental health to make a compelling case to apply and evaluate locally appropriate policy and practice interventions to promote mental health.

MESSAGE 6 – COLLECTIVE ACTION DEPENDS ON SHARED VALUES AS MUCH AS THE QUALITY OF SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE

In some communities, time-honoured practices and ways of life maintain mental health even though mental health may not be identified as the outcome, or identified by name. In other communities, people need to be convinced that making an effort to improve mental health is realistic and worthwhile.

MESSAGE 7 – A CLIMATE THAT RESPECTS AND PROTECTS BASIC CIVIL, POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS IS FUNDAMENTAL TO THE PROMOTION OF MENTAL HEALTH

Without the security and freedom provided by these rights it is very difficult to maintain a high level of mental health.

MESSAGE 8 – INTERSECTORAL LINKAGE IS THE KEY FOR MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION

Mental health can be improved through the collective action of society. Improving mental health requires policies and programmes in government and business sectors including

education, labour, justice, transport, environment, housing and welfare, as well as specific activities in the health field relating to the prevention and treatment of ill-health.

MESSAGE 9 – MENTAL HEALTH IS EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS

Those who can do something to promote mental health, and who have something to gain, include individuals, families, communities, commercial organizations and health professionals. Particularly important are the decision-makers in governments at local and national levels whose actions affect mental health in ways that they may not realize. International bodies can ensure that countries at all stages of economic development are aware of the importance of mental health to community development. They can also encourage them to assess the possibilities and evidence for intervening to improve the mental health of their population.

One other stakeholder not mentioned to be in everyone's business is the press. The power of the media is considerable and the press should actively promote positive mental health and keep everybody on the same page on what is going on.

CONCLUSIONS

The 9 key messages of the WHO publication describes the strategy to achieve positive mental health worldwide. The motivating force must come from everyone. The bottom line is there is no health without mental health. The motivating force for mental health for helping everyone achieve positive mental health must come from everyone – people, policy makers and profession. The press should keep everyone aware too.

REFERENCES

World Health Organisation. Promoting Mental Health. Geneva:WHO, 2005.

LEARNING POINTS

- **Health systems around the world face enormous challenges in delivering care and protecting the human rights of people with mental, neurological and substance use disorders.**
 - **The 9 key messages of the WHO publication Promoting Mental Health describes the strategy to achieve positive mental health worldwide.**
 - **The bottom line is there is no health without mental health.**
 - **The motivating force for mental health for helping everyone achieve positive mental health must come from everyone – people, policy makers and profession. The press should keep everyone aware too.**
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