



**Pan American
Health
Organization**

Regional Office of the
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**MENTAL HEALTH, DISABILITIES
AND
REHABILITATION
BULLETIN**

November 2008

Workshop on mental health in emergencies – Belize, Central America, July 2008



During the last week of July, the mental health program, PAHO, the Representation of Belize and Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Relief program (PED) in CDC, organized a workshop on mental health in emergencies. The workshop was attended by the mental health staff, doctors and public health officers, representatives from the Ministry of Health (MOH), Ministry of Human Development, NEMO, UNICEF, Red Cross, University of Belize.

The aim of the workshop was the elaboration of a Mental Health Plan for Emergencies. A draft plan was prepared by the working group and is now being finalized by the Commission established that will monitor as well the implementation of the Plan was finally approved.

During the workshops, Ms Monica Zaccarelli (PED in CPC) introduced main disaster management concepts; Ms. Dévora Kestel (Mental Health in CPC) introduced mental health perspective in emergencies, emphasizing the concepts around 'normal reactions to abnormal situations'; national authorities introduced the national plan for emergencies, the health component of that plan, and Dr Cayetano (MOH) presented a draft for the mental health component drafted by the mental health staff of the MOH in collaboration with the Interns from the Denver University.

Summer Internship in Belize

During 8 weeks last summer, Linda Baker and Alyson Welch arrived in Belize City, as part of a summer internship for PAHO. They are both students of the International Disaster Psychology program at Denver University.

The students, allocated at the Representation of Belize, worked in close collaboration with Dr Claudina Cayetano and her staff. They were involved in different activities in the field of mental health in emergency situations; including training psychiatric nurse practitioners about how patients would normally react in a disaster and support the process to develop a national mental health disaster plan.

A similar experience took place in Jamaica as well.



Linda Baker, Dr. Claudina Cayetano and Alyson Welch.

“Seminar on Mental Health: Integration is the Way”

Itaipú, Brazil, 24-25 October 2008

Organized by the Itaipú Technical Group on Health, part of the binational Paraguayan-Brazilian agency, this seminar was held before a large audience. Drs. Joel de Lima of Brazil and Luis Merelles García of Paraguay opened the event.

Over 120 participants from border areas in Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay responded to the call for a meeting on an integrated approach to health. Public and private-sector representatives from disciplines connected with health and mental health met on the grounds of the Region's largest hydroelectric dam, located on the outskirts of Foz de Iguazú. The lengthy agenda included working groups devoted to aspects that were fundamental to the work, seeking to arrive at conclusions that would lead to better coordination among the countries to tackle common problems. The speakers were Dr. Mirta Mendoza, Mental Health Director of Paraguay; Dr. Francisco Cordeiro, of the Mental Health Bureau of Brasilia; a health representative from the municipal government of Posadas, Argentina, and Dr. Hugo Cohen, Subregional Mental Health Adviser for South America. The participants showed great interest in exploring common problems and finding the best solutions and were very eager to learn about everyone's day-to-day experiences in their work

The imminent signing of the Paraguay-Brazil agreement for technical cooperation among countries (TCC) to transform mental health systems in the framework of community efforts will foster even greater interaction among border health workers, with active support from PAHO. Alternatives were identified in MERCOSUR that will facilitate the involvement of more local actors along the common border of the three countries and lend continuity to joint projects. Concerning this last point, the mental health authorities of Brazil, in conjunction with the Subregional Adviser on Mental Health, made a commitment to searching for ways to develop an institutional framework for this innovative initiative in a social landscape with countless needs.

Report Mental Health and Primary Care In Medium– and Low-Income Countries

WHO-WONCA

The International Primary Care and Mental Health Symposium, organized by the Ministry of Health of Chile and sponsored by Canada's Centre for Addictions and Mental Health (CAMH) and PAHO,



The agenda included presentations on some interesting innovative experiences in Peru and Mexico. Addressing an audience of around 70 people, representatives of the Canadian sponsoring agency, together with Dr. Gabriel Ibviaro, Coordinator of the WONCA (World Organization of Family Doctors) Working Party on Mental Health, and Dr. Hugo Cohen, Subregional Mental Health Adviser for South America, announced the publication of the new document on Primary Care in Mental Health, a subject that met with considerable interest among the attendees.

Present at the opening of the event were: Dr. María Soledad Barría, Minister of Health of Chile; the Director of International Cooperation of CAMH, Ontario, Canada, and Dr. Manuel Sotelo, PAHO Representative in Chile.

The minister emphasized the value of the primary care strategy and the great strides that her country had made with the introduction of the mental health component. She described the recent results of a study on the burden of disease in Chile, pointing out that neuropsychiatric disorders account for 25% of it, with depression and alcoholism the most common ailments. As these disorders represent the greatest burden of disease for the country, she underscored the need to prioritize support for mental health care, improving and expanding existing services. Dr. Sotelo reported on the recent approval of the agreement for technical cooperation among countries (TCC) to strengthen community-based mental health services. This PAHO initiative will facilitate greater linkage and cooperation among Peru, Chile, and Argentina, enabling them to share innovative experiences in the development of new mental health systems.