



Bulletin of the Mental Health, Substance Abuse and Rehabilitation Unit

October 2007

Unit Team:

Dr. Jorge Rodriguez
Unit Chief
(Washington, D.C., USA)
rodrigo@paho.org

Dr. Maristela Monteiro
Regional Adviser on Alcohol and Substance Abuse
(Washington, D.C., USA)
monteirm@paho.org

Dr. Hugo Cohen
Sub-regional Adviser on Mental Health for South America (Buenos Aires, Argentina)
cohenh@arg.ops-oms.org

Dr. Victor Aparicio
Sub-regional Adviser on Mental Health for Mexico, Central America, and the Hispanic Caribbean
(Panamá, Panamá)
aparicit@pan.ops-oms.org

Mrs. Devora Kestel
Sub-regional Adviser on Mental Health for the English Speaking Caribbean Countries (Barbados)
kestelde@cpc.paho.org

Dr. Armando Vásquez
Regional Adviser on Rehabilitation
(Santiago, Chile)
vasqueza@chi.ops-oms.org

Mr. Javier Vásquez
Human Rights Specialist
Legal Affairs Area /Technology and Health Services Delivery Area
(Washington, D.C., USA)
vasquerj@paho.org

Prof. M.Florencia Di Masi de Alconada -Consultant-
Mental Health, Alcohol, Substance Abuse and Rehabilitation Unit
(Washington, DC, USA)
dimasima@paho.org

Secretariat:
Mrs. Martha Koev
koevmart@paho.org

The Bulletin of the Mental Health, Substance Abuse and Rehabilitation Unit of the Pan American Health Organization / World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) is issued with the purpose of informing about important advances, news and publications in the areas of mental health, alcohol and substance abuse, rehabilitation and the protection of human rights within this context. In particular, the Bulletin focuses on those activities related to the technical assistance provided by PAHO/WHO to different actors in the Region. We hope it will become a useful tool for all those working in this important field of public health all over the Americas.

The Unit Team

WHO urges more investments, services for mental health

The call is targeted at public health planners and urges them to assign a higher priority to mental health.

4 September 2007 | Geneva – The World Health Organization (WHO) is appealing to countries for an increase in their support for mental health services. The appeal is part of a series of six reviews on global mental health published in the journal “The Lancet”. WHO has worked closely with the Journal to generate the evidence and formulate the call for action.

Mental disorders are common but as many as half of all people with severe mental disorders and a vast majority of those with mild or moderate disorders worldwide do not receive any treatment. Even when treatment is available, it is often delivered in institutional settings which in many countries are associated with stigma and human rights violations.

The reasons for this bleak situation are clear: mental health services are being starved of both human and financial resources. WHO's Mental Health Atlas database shows that a majority of countries in Africa and South-East Asia spend less than 1% of their health budget on mental health. Low-income countries have an average of 0.05 psychiatrists and 0.16 psychiatric nurses per 100,000 population (about 200 times less than in high-income countries). [More information>>](#)



WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY

10 October 2007

Mental Health in a Changing World: The Impact of Culture and Diversity

[World Federation for Mental Health>>](#)

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Central America and the Spanish-Speaking Caribbean Countries Mental Health Sub-Regional Meeting Panama City, 17-19 September 2007

It was organized by the Panamerican Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) under the sponsorship of the Government of Panama. The event's main objective was to discuss and analyze the results of the mental health systems evaluations, which were carried out in some Central American and Spanish-Speaking Caribbean countries (Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Honduras, Panama, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic), using the WHO-AIMS assessment tool.



Mental health coordinators from the ministries of health of the participating countries as well as PAHO/WHO national consultants in charge of the subject, representatives from Cuba and Belize and members of the Regional Mental Health, Substance Abuse and Rehabilitation Unit attended the meeting together with Dr. Benedetto Sarraceno, WHO Mental Health and Substance Abuse Department Director. Also present at the opening of the event: Mrs. Balbina Herrera, Panama's Minister of Housing, Dr. Guadalupe Verdejo, PAHO/WHO Representative in Panama, and public officials from Panama's Ministry of Health and from the National Mental Health Institute.

Right after the opening ceremony and before an audience of more than 100 people, Dr. Benedetto Sarraceno delivered a lecture on "Mental Health at the Global Level. Current Situation and Perspectives".



The participants carried out an in-depth analysis of the present situation of mental health services in each country as well as an evaluation of the Sub-region as a whole, which revealed several aspects to give priority to in future PAHO/WHO technical cooperation. The weakness of the mental health information systems, the need to both, strengthen national mental health policies and plans, and promote the community mental health model and its integration with the Health Systems, could be inferred from the discussions. They unanimously agreed on the necessity to decentralize services and create policies for the development and training of human resources; and on the importance of the role of mental health nurses in these processes.

In the last session, Dr. Juana Herrera, the National Mental Health Institute Director, and Dr. Víctor Aparicio, PAHO/WHO Mental Health Sub-regional Advisor, presented and described the background of the book: "Mental Health Development in Panama. History and Present", which was then commented on by Dr. Jorge Rodríguez, Chief of PAHO/WHO Mental Health, Substance Abuse and Rehabilitation Unit. The work points out the remarkable advances made by Panama in the field of mental health in the last three decades. The country can presently show important achievements and place itself among the most advanced in Latin America.



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South American Mental Health Authorities Forum: Towards the Modernization of Mental Health Services

Luján, Provincia de Buenos Aires, Argentina,
3-5 September, 2007

Representatives from ten South American countries and from the Panamerican Health Organization (PAHO) gathered in Argentina to analyze the situation of mental health services in the Sub-region. The specialists agreed on moving forward towards the revision and reform of Mental Health Services and on creating the first Latin American Mental Health Network of Users (Patients), Families and Volunteers, with the aim of promoting the rights of people with mental disorders.

During the forum, the participants discussed possible strategies to replace the current system of psychiatric admissions with new mechanisms that will enable the integration of mental health care services within the general health system, a model that has already been implemented in some cities of Chile, Brazil, and Mexico. Another conclusion they arrived at, was the necessity to provide proper training to mental health nurses and other mental health workers and professionals, as well as to find spaces of articulation between mental health and justice in order to give appropriate responses to the every day problems of people living with mental disorders. They also agreed on the need to develop mental health services that promote the social re-insertion of people with mental disorders, though this will entail a cultural change in society.

The Minister of Public Health of Argentina, Dr. Ginés González García, and the Minister of Health of the Province of Buenos Aires, Lic. Claudio Mate, were both present at the opening. Representatives from the Secretariat for Human Rights of the National Ministry of Justice; patients, families and volunteers from Chile, Brazil and Argentina; and representatives from the Panamerican Mental Health Nurses Network also participated in the event.

New guidelines on psychological care in emergencies

14 September 2007 ~ International humanitarian agencies have agreed on a new set of guidelines on the mental health and psychosocial needs of survivors of conflicts and disasters.



The guidelines emphasize that protecting survivors' mental health is the responsibility of all humanitarian agencies and workers, and not just of psychiatrists and psychologists.
[More about the guidelines>>](#)

Panama

Intersector Committee for Suicide Prevention and Control

The recently created "Intersector Committee for Suicide Prevention and Control" started its activities at the Ministry of Health, coinciding with the celebration of the **World Suicide Prevention Day** (10 September). Its main purpose is to contribute to the improvement of the general population's mental health, focusing its efforts on suicidal behavior risk groups. The Committee has four sub-committees: sensitizing, teaching and training; research; information systems; treatment protocols. Its strategy is based on Panama's Plan for the Prevention of Suicidal Behavior, which receives technical support from PAHO.



<http://www.bireme.br/>

**Mental Health in the
Americas**
[A mental reform>>](#)

New information section in
PAHO'S Website

Coming EVENTS

-20th Annual USA Psychiatric and Mental Health Congress, Orlando, Florida, USA, 11-14 October, 2007. www.cmellc.com/psychcongress

-Psychosocial Programmes in Emergencies: What are we learning from practice? Oxford, UK, 27- 28 October, 2007. <http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/>

- WPA International Congress, "Working Together for Mental Health: Partnerships for Policy and Practice", Melbourne, Australia, 28 Nov.-2 Dec., 2007. <http://www.wpa2007.melbourne.com>