

Bulletin of the Mental Health and Specialized Programs Unit



August 2006

Unit Team

Dr. José Luis Di Fabio, Interim
Chief (Washington, D.C.)

difabioj@paho.org

Dr. Hugo Cohen, Subregional
Adviser on Mental Health for
South America (Argentina)

cohenh@arg.ops-oms.org

Dr. Maristela Monteiro
Regional Adviser on Alcohol
and Substance Abuse
(Washington, D.C.)

monteirm@paho.org

Dr. Jorge Rodríguez,
Subregional Adviser on Mental
Health for Central America,
Mexico, and the Latin
Caribbean Countries
(Panama)

rodrigoj@pan.ops-oms.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.)

vasquezj@paho.org

Secretariat:

Mrs. Amalia Paredes

paredama@paho.org

Mrs. Martha Koev

koevmart@paho.org

The Mental Health and Specialized Programs Unit of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)/World Health Organization (WHO) is pleased to send you a new issue of the Bulletin. Like previous issues, the object of this publication is to communicate important advances, news, and information on publications in the fields of mental health, the control of alcohol and substance abuse, rehabilitation, and the international protection of human rights in this context. The main objectives of this Unit are to strengthen the countries' capacity to develop mental health policies, plans, programs, and services; formulate public policies for the control of alcohol abuse; prevent disabilities and achieve equal opportunities for people with disabilities; and promote and protect the human rights and fundamental liberties of people with disabilities and their families. In this issue, the bulletin highlights advances in the promotion and protection of the human rights of people with mental illness.

Disability and Rehabilitation

The disability situation in the Region is a complex public health problem, given its social and economic repercussions. In Latin America and the Caribbean, an estimated 60 million people, or approximately 10% of the Region's population, have some type of disability. Furthermore, the number of people with disabilities is rapidly growing due to the rise in chronic diseases, the emergence and reemergence of diseases, violence (including social violence and armed conflicts), alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drug use and abuse, and accidents of every kind. Other determinants of disability include the aging of the population, malnutrition, child abandonment, the neglect of certain social groups such as ethnic populations, extreme poverty, population displacement, and natural disasters. This public health problem is compounded further by the fact that only 2-3% of the population with disabilities has access to health services and programs. As a result, disabled people do have little opportunity to participate in development programs and initiatives with other people in their community. More often than not, they are denied public services, and their human rights and dignity are neither recognized nor respected.

PAHO/WHO provides technical assistance and cooperation to Member-States for the development of policies, plans, programs, and interventions to ensure that steps are taken to promote health, prevent disabilities, offer comprehensive rehabilitation, and equalize opportunities for people with disabilities. This has made rehabilitation part of the healthcare model, with Community-based Rehabilitation (CBR) representing an effort to deal with the new challenges produced by the gap between the needs of people with disabilities and their access to healthcare.

As health and wellbeing are human rights, addressing the disability problem is a social, not personal, responsibility. PAHO/WHO has taken steps to encourage the Member States to acknowledge their responsibility to improve social, economic, and health conditions and ensure the full participation of all members of society, including people with disabilities. These steps include:

- Establishing and implementing rehabilitation policies and programs.

**Mark your calendar: World Mental Health Day
is on 10/10. See our previous Bulletin.**

Bulletin of the Mental Health and Specialized Programs Unit

- Promoting technical cooperation among countries.
- Characterizing and analyzing the disability situation.
- Implementing the Community-based Rehabilitation (CBR) strategy.
- Developing special projects: Helping landmine victims in Central America; establishing CBR in indigenous areas and locations on the outskirts of cities.
- Fostering socioeconomic inclusion and integration.
- Promoting school enrollment and inclusive education.
- Creating national rehabilitation boards.
- Developing protocols and regulations for disability prevention and rehabilitation.
- Improving rehabilitation services.
- Collaborating with municipal authorities to establish programs to promote accessibility and the elimination of physical barriers in public spaces.
- Improving training for human resources.
- Strengthening orthotic and prosthetic services.
- Supporting the implementation of the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities.

Current and future efforts to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities and to promote the equalization of their opportunities require more than just the participation of the health sector. Multi-sectoral actions and interventions must be harmonized, and the participation of people with disabilities, their families and their community must be guaranteed, for rehabilitation is a shared social responsibility.

II Latin American Award for Health Journalism, Red-Salud 2006.

Alcohol consumption can lead to a wide range of social and health problems, including death and accidents caused by drinking and driving, aggression, domestic violence, child abuse, lower productivity in the workplace, cancer, and liver and heart disease. The economic cost associated with drinking is also substantial. In the United States, for example, an estimated \$148 billion is spent each year on alcohol, while in Canada it accounts for 2.7% of the gross domestic product. States create legislative and regulatory frameworks to promote effective measures to mitigate the problems associated with alcohol consumption at all levels of society. However, most countries in the Americas are still battling with not only high alcohol consumption, but also the high rate of its acceptance. As a result,

journalists and the media are now faced with an enormous responsibility, as well as a great opportunity, to raise awareness, promote public policies, and correctly inform the public about this issue.

For this reason, Red-Salud, a network of journalists, media, and civil society sources and organizations, with the support of PAHO, the Health Communications Initiative, and the Foundation for a New Ibero-American Journalism, is inviting journalists to submit applications for the II Latin American Award for Health Journalism, Red-Salud/2006, which will reward the best journalistic efforts to raise awareness about alcohol as a public health problem.

Deadline for online registration and submission of articles: 17 November 2006.

For more information about this award check:

<http://www.comminit.com/la/redsaldud/awards/2006/index.html>

To apply:

http://www.comminit.com/la/redsaldud/awards/form_1.php

Information about the WHO Mental Health Department (Geneva) can be accessed at: www.who.int/mental_health/en/