

Bulletin of the Mental Health and Specialized Programs Unit



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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.

The World Federation for Mental Health Announces Plans for World Mental Health Day 2006 on 10/10

The World Federation for Mental Health (WFMH) has announced plans for the celebration of World Mental Health Day 2006 on 10/10. The 2006 global awareness campaign theme is **Building Awareness- Reducing Risk: Mental Illness and Suicide**, and addresses one of the world's major public health concerns. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that over 1 million people die by suicide each year, and that non-fatal self-inflicted injuries are probably at least 20 times greater than completed suicides.

"In many cases, suicide represents a tragic consequence of failing to recognize and treat severe mental illness," said Shona Sturgeon, President of the World Federation for Mental Health. "Studies from both developed and developing countries show a high prevalence of mental illnesses among those who die by suicide. "

Professor Sturgeon noted that, according to WHO estimates, "90% of people completing suicide have at least one (often undiagnosed and untreated) mental illness, or abuse drugs or alcohol. This is a major health problem that represents 1.4% of the global health burden. It needs the public's attention and action by our governments. WFMH is organizing this year's World Mental Health Day activities to call for greater understanding and action regarding suicide and mental illness."

Campaign materials packets providing information on the relationship of mental illness and suicide are being distributed by WFMH to over 4000 organizations in 150 countries to encourage local and national mental health organizations to plan and conduct their own World Mental Health Day programs and campaigns intended to improve public awareness, reduce stigma and discrimination, and promote service and policy advocacy to address the global impact that suicide associated with mental disorders has on the global burden of disease.

The World Federation for Mental Health organizes World Mental Health Day each year. It is the only

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global public awareness campaign focusing exclusively on major mental health topics. World Mental Health Day was first commemorated in 1992, and is now observed on October 10 in over 100 countries.

The 2006 World Mental Health Day global awareness campaign packets are available from WFMH and may be requested by e-mailing the Federation at wmhday@wfmh.com. The materials can be downloaded from the WFMH website at www.wfmh.com, and are available in English, French and Spanish.

NOTE: Specific information about your country's suicide rates can be found at:

www.who.int/entity/mental_health/prevention/suicide_rates/en/

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Promotion of Mental Health and Prevention of Psychological Disorders

The World Health Organization (WHO) recently published two summary reports:

- Promoting Mental Health: Concepts, Emerging Evidence, Practice
- Prevention of Mental Disorders: Effective Interventions and Policy Options

Both publications have been prepared by high-level international experts. The reports review and update the issues and disseminate information about programs based on the most successful experiences worldwide. The information is useful to public health planners and mental health professionals and also serves as an excellent educational resource.

Promoting mental health is a relatively unknown concept to many, even some public health workers whose concepts about mental illness continue to be based on myths and stigmas.

The Mental Health and Specialized Programs Unit of PAHO/WHO has translated into Spanish and printed these summary reports for dissemination in Latin America. The publications are currently being delivered to the countries for use at the national level.

Work in Progress: The Justice-National Human Rights Secretariat-Mental Health Working Group

With technical support from PAHO/WHO, the Justice-National Human Rights Secretariat (DDHH)-Mental Health Working Group was established to support psychiatric reforms and the development of community-based services in Argentina. The working group includes of mental health officials from the Ministry of Health and Environment and from mental health agencies of the municipality and province of Buenos Aires; representatives of the DDHH, which corresponds to the Argentine Supreme Court of Justice, and from the DDHH Secretariat of the municipality of Buenos Aires; and several directors of large hospitals and psychiatric clinics in the province of Buenos Aires.

The weekly meetings have several objectives, including:

1. Establishing common working strategies to transform services;
2. Informing the various actors involved about current international standards and treaties, PAHO/WHO recommendations and laws and regulations that foster the promotion and defense of the rights of people with mental illness;
3. Promoting exchanges among those involved in the process in order to facilitate progress toward transforming services on the basis of successful experiences that are under way.

A subsequent step in the process will involve presenting a letter from health and justice authorities to the Supreme Court of Justice inviting the judges and other members of the judicial system to attend a seminar to update and disseminate prevailing standards in defense of the rights of people with mental illness, taking into account recent Court decisions in this regard. Regional workshops and seminars with the same objectives will also be held. Those invited to participate in these activities will include officials from the judicial branch, public defenders, mental health authorities, directors of psychiatric hospitals

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and other management officials who work in the field, nongovernmental organizations that work with patients and their family members, and representatives of universities, trade unions, and worker associations, among others. Activities will be accompanied by a mass media campaign to disseminate information and sensitize the public about the issues.

Event to Be Held in 2006

34th Congress of the Psychiatric Association of Latin America (*Asociación Psiquiátrica de América Latina - APAL*), 14th Congress of the Dominican Society of Psychiatry, and the Sixth Symposium of the Dominican School of Neuropsychopharmacology, at the Barceló Bávaro Convention Center, Punta Cana, Dominican Republic, November 1-4, 2006, organized by CongreExpo of the Caribbean. For more information: E-mail: psiquiatria@congreexpo.com or info@congreexpo.com. Website: www.congreexpo.com / www.apal2006.com. Tel.: (809) 567-4305 / 540- 4576; Fax: (809) 563- 0382

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