

Strategic developments in the delivery of psychiatric services worldwide

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We are delighted to have a trio of papers from senior staff members of the World Health Organization (WHO) on the strategic development plans for psychiatric services in the African Region, in Latin America and the Caribbean, and in the Western Pacific. We are truly privileged to publish these valuable documents, which reflect the current state of the WHO's attempts to improve psychiatric services worldwide.

Dr Carina Ferreira-Borges reports from Africa, and draws attention to the WHO's Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan for 2013–20. This emphasises the importance of delivering care in the community and of considering the notion of recovery. Despite the emphasis in the plan on moving away from a purely medical model to a socially responsive model of care for people with mental health problems, there has been little movement in this direction in Africa. Unfortunately, in most African states, mental health has a low priority. It is considered to be a 'small problem' compared with the burden of communicable diseases, an attitude fostered by the big donors from the West.

Dr Jorge Rodriguez reflects on the possibilities of delivering the objectives of the WHO's Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan in Latin America and the Caribbean. He points out that the small proportion of the health budget of countries in the region that is spent on mental health is targeted largely at mental hospitals. Only two-thirds of countries in the region have a national mental health plan. There are considerable constraints and difficulties to overcome before 2020.

Finally, Dr Xiangdong Wang reports from the Western Pacific. He draws our attention to the very high rate of suicide in this region: an astonishing one in three of all suicides globally takes place here. Encouraging news is adduced. There is recognition among health ministers that the disasters associated with the region in recent years have increased the burden of mental health problems, and that effective action is urgently required. It is gratifying to read about the initiatives that are taking root in the region, including a strategy to manage the high suicide rate and the pending transformation of mental healthcare delivery.

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENTS IN THE DELIVERY OF PSYCHIATRIC SERVICES WORLDWIDE

Mental health: strengthening health and development opportunities in the WHO African Region

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Despite the efforts of the World Health Organization (WHO) to put mental health at the core of the health and development agendas, the underdevelopment of services in Africa is widespread. The adoption of the WHO's Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013–20 at the 66th World Health Assembly in May 2013 provides an opportunity to reshape policy. In the African Region, mental health generally appears to be of low interest and people with mental health conditions are not prioritised. This article describes factors that contribute to this low level of interest and

recommends collective action to prioritise mental health on the public health and social development agendas. It is also a call to all stakeholders to increase financial investment and bring mental health out of the shadows.

Research has shown that addressing mental health has a positive impact not only on the overall burden of diseases but also on human development, including economic growth and poverty and conflict reduction. The World Health Organization (WHO) has played an active role in