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THE INCREASED PREVALENCE OF MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

Issues of Quality in Psychiatric Education

The WPA seeks to improve the mental health of people living in the world including Latin American region, by promoting the strengthening and dissemination of an integrated, comprehensive and proactive response by the Health Sector, while encouraging the implementation of mental disorder awareness, prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation programs.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, as in other continents, economic progress, social transformation and extended longevity have been accompanied by an increase in psychosocial issues and in the prevalence of mental disorders. When restructuring mental health educational programs, professionals should consider these economic, social and health developments as essential, not only for welfare of the individual, but also for economic growth and for reducing poverty in specific communities or countries.

To address the problem of increased prevalence of mental disorders, it is necessary to seek opportunities for change that will enable care that is efficient and of high quality. Mental health educational programs must include training on the problems of vulnerable groups, such as indigenous peoples and communities affected by natural disasters, or children and adolescents, as well as suicidal behavior, alcohol and/or substance abuse, and different forms of violence. This requires the active participation of government mental health services departments (which deal with these problems) in mental health education programs, as a priority of their public health strategy. Training programs (both undergraduate and post graduate) should address the real mental health needs of the population. This calls for harmonization and integration of approaches, including transversal or cross-cutting gender, ethnicity and culture based approaches.

ACTION PLAN

The WPA Education action plan should be a comprehensive and interdisciplinary program that combines research and education, self-learning and teamwork. It would develop regional training activities, particularly in Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe, and adapt these training programs to local circumstances, working hand in hand with the presidents of the societies and institutions in these regions.

Evaluation and measurement in mental health programs

requires clear definitions of the programs objectives. This will permit better evaluation of the programs and their impact. We must emphasize the effectiveness and validation of educational programs (including curriculum and performance assessment), and adapt this approach to different countries and their realities.

Geographic and linguistic diversity must also be addressed carefully in creating mechanisms for participation. Attention to local cultural frameworks must become a key element in defining future classification concepts. By definition, primary care settings represent the best opportunity to improve the identification and effective treatment of people with mental disorders.

The WPA Secretary for Education suggests that an action plan should:

- Find ways to assist local actors in identifying and solving their own problems through integral programmes that focus mainly on existing programs to promote health, prevent disease and reduce risk.
- Stimulate the development of mental health and hygiene programmes.
- Include research findings on health equity and other ethical issues, and stress the important role these concerns play as cultural forces..
- Stimulate and motivate the humanization of hospitals and health centres.
- Motivate and strengthen outpatient and community services, using social networks.
- Stimulate and motivate optimal use of the newest therapeutic approaches and techniques, because of the advantages they can offer.
- Pay attention to psychosocial risk factors, such as nicotine poisoning of children, drug abuse, criminal behaviour, domestic violence, poverty, unemployment, malnutrition, early and risky sexual activity, accidents, illiteracy, etc.
- Organize Fellowship Program to support the participation of highly promising early career psychiatrists from across the world.

Increasing efforts to reduce the stigma of mental illness and reinforcing legislation protecting human rights are specific requirements to achieve a higher quality psychiatric practice in the care of people in Latin America, as well as in the rest of the world. □

— *The author is WPA Secretary for Education*