



**Pan American
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**MENTAL HEALTH, DISABILITIES
AND
REHABILITATION
BULLETIN**

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Mental Health Information System workshop Saint Lucia, 4-6 November, 2008

Mental disorders and substance abuse has been identified as priority health conditions and key areas of work in the Pan American Health Organization/ World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) Eastern Caribbean Cooperation Strategy 2006-2009. PAHO/WHO Offices for the Eastern Caribbean and the Caribbean Programme Coordination hosted a two and a half day Mental Health Information System workshop in Gros Islet St. Lucia, 4- 6 November, 2008. The workshop was developed in response to the request for technical assistance in developing the mental health information system of Barbados and the nine countries and territories of the English speaking Eastern Caribbean.

During the course of the meeting presentations were made on the health information system in Dominica and mental health data which has been gathered to date on the island of St. Lucia. Representatives from the PAHO/WHO Offices for the Eastern Caribbean and the Caribbean Programme Coordination introduced the process of developing a mental health information system. The process includes the development of indicators to monitor the country's progress in achieving the objectives of its mental health policy and plan.



The 28 country/territory representatives identified a set of core indicators based on their country's/territory's mental health objectives using the WHO-AIMS as a guide. The indicators will be used in the development of their country's/territory's mental health information system. The methodology of the WHO-AIMS was also presented and the country/territory representatives unanimously agreed that its implementation would be beneficial to their country/territory; furthermore they agreed that it would simultaneously contribute to the process of developing a clear evidence based 'picture' of the current situation in mental health whilst providing a baseline for future monitoring.

Workshop on continue deinstitutionalization of mental health services Kingston, Jamaica, 26 – 28 November, 2008

The mental health services in Jamaica have been on a path towards decentralization and development of the community mental health services since the 1960's. Significant gains in respect to integration of mental health care at the primary health care level and in some regions at the secondary health care level were made over the years. However, the mental hospital currently has about 800 beds, most of which are occupied by persons with chronic mental illness who need various levels of supervision, but not necessary hospitalization. The hospital still utilizes a large proportion of the budgetary allocation to mental health.

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The Southeast Regional Health Authority in which the mental hospital is located is the most highly populated of four (4) health regions, having almost half of the island's population. The Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services of the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) organized a workshop, facilitated by Devora Kestel, Sub-Regional Mental Health Advisor. The purpose of the workshop was to develop an implementation and resource mobilization plan to continue the process of decentralization of the mental health services (from the mental hospital), including deinstitutionalization.

The participants of the workshop included a team of high officials from the Ministry of Health & Environment, Regional Health authorities and mental health professionals from the regions, the Bellevue Mental Hospital and the University of the West Indies.

Amidst many passionate expressions of views, some key objectives were agreed, as well as identified specific objectives, activities and tasks. One very important outcome was the recommendation to establish an 'active committee' with a designated 'driver' to lead the process of the reform.



“An Organization for Social Integration through Sports and Culture”

Buenos Aires, Argentina, 25-29 November 2008

“Patas Arriba” (Upside down) is a national and international cultural and sports organization that has come out in favor of social integration and against stigma and discrimination through cultural and sports activities, appreciating the abilities that all people have.

Fairs, concerts, clubs, soccer, community festivals, bands, *candombe* (African-influenced dance), debates, circuses, and artistic activities are some of the free activities that took place from 25 to 29 November in different parts of the City and Province of Buenos Aires.



These open cultural events converged on Saturday the 29th at 9 Julio and Avenida de Mayo, leading to a march to the Plaza de Mayo. Large numbers of people joined together in the afternoon, meeting through artistic activities at venues set up in the Plaza de Mayo and through the arrival of bands from some city neighborhoods. The colorful festival was interrupted by a wind and rain storm that did not dampen the enthusiasm of those present, many of whom lingered an hour longer in the Plaza de Mayo.

The purpose of the public events was to shine a spotlight on the problem of the chronic isolation of people with mental illness institutionalized in psychiatric hospitals and on the importance of restoring their civil rights. “We are all different, and with our own peculiarities can share a moment, appreciate others, recognize ourselves, express, feel, and look, and become whole by doing something that we enjoy,” affirm the organizers of the event.

The activity was promoted by **ADESAM** (Association for the Defense of Mental Health Rights of Argentina); **ANPIS**, (Associazione Nazionale Polisportive Dilettantische per l'Integrazione Sociale - National Amateur Multisports Association for Social Integration), an Italian association for community integration through sports and culture, and **UNASAM** (Unione Nazionale delle Associazioni per Salute Mentale - National Union of the Mental Health Association), which works with users and relatives to promote dignity and rights. These organizations facilitated the presence of users from Italy, France, and England.



The event, supported and sponsored by PAHO, was considered of legislative interest by the Legislature of the City of Buenos Aires and both houses of the Legislature of Buenos Aires Province. It was also endorsed by the National Ministry of Health, the National Secretariat for Human Rights, several government agencies of the City of Buenos Aires, Maimónides University, the National Public Library Commission (CONABIP), and the Association of State Workers (TIES), among other institutions.

Projects for Technical Cooperation among Countries in South America

Two projects for technical cooperation among countries (TCC) were recently approved. The initiatives involve Peru, Chile, and Argentina on the one hand, and Brazil and Paraguay on the other, and have the potential for strengthening interaction and assistance among countries.

The programs, which were developed by the countries' respective mental health authorities, with support from the local PAHO Offices and subregional technical assistance, promote the development and consolidation of community-based mental health systems. A major objective is to bridge the gap between people with mental illness and people who are not receiving treatment for their problems; the Mental Health Global Action Plan (mhGAP) of WHO will be a point of reference for the work to be undertaken; the Plan emphasized the possibility of teaching and learning from one's own experiences and those of others in similar social and cultural contexts. This is the first time that this type of agreement on mental health has been reached in South America, and two more are under negotiation.

Uruguay Makes Headway in Developing its Mental Health Services

PAHO recently provided assistance for several working meetings in Montevideo to include mental health in the new Integrated National Health System and, especially, to promote the development of mental health services in general hospitals and primary health centers and systematize intersectoral efforts. There was great enthusiasm about the possibilities in this regard.

Efforts are already under way to prepare a new mental health plan and draft the national mental health bill. The new director of mental health, licensed nurse René del Castillo, is particularly interested in improving human resource development and the quality of care.

PAHO agreed to collaborate with the new mental health authorities through technical support for these initiatives, to put family associations in contact with their counterparts in other countries of the Region, and to develop mechanisms for better interaction between the courts and the Ministry of Health. In this regard, three members of the advisory team (two lawyers and a psychologist) participated in the Justice and Mental Health Seminar held by the Supreme Court of Justice of the Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina.

The search for initiatives that will enable the actors in the reform processes to share experiences with their counterparts in neighboring countries will continue; in particular, to support the work begun on the transformation of the Echeperé Colony, which is promoting the release of patients into the community, training caregivers in local families who reside in the town surrounding the institution. The next step will be to train the staff to work outside the Colony and to look into the possibility of offering incentives for working in the community.

In mid-2009, the mental health authorities of Montevideo are planning to hold an event on Innovative Experiences in MERCOSUR.

Workshop on Mental Health Information Systems in Nicaragua

On 17 and 18 November a workshop on mental health information systems, organized by the Ministry of Health and the Pan American Health Organization, was held in Managua. Attended by mental health professionals, health service managers, and health information technical support personnel, its objective was to strengthen mental health component of the National Health Information System.

Workshop of the Project for Technical Cooperation among Countries (Nicaragua, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic)

On 19 and 20 November the Nicaragua, Cuba, Dominican Republic project for technical cooperation among countries held a workshop in Managua, Nicaragua, on the primary and community mental health care network, with special emphasis on strengthening coordination between levels and the role of nursing.

Evaluation of Mental Health Systems in Costa Rica and Honduras

On 11 November, the **evaluation of the mental health system of Costa Rica**, conducted with the WHO AIMS instrument, was presented. A workshop attended by professionals from all over the country was held, whose opening session was presided over by Minister of Health Dr. María Luisa Ávila.

On 24 November, the **evaluation of the mental health system of Honduras**, conducted with the WHO AIMS instrument, was presented in Tegucigalpa. The report was submitted officially by the PAHO Representative Office in Honduras to Dr. Jorge Fernández, representative of the Ministry of Health. A workshop for mental health professionals, coordinated by the National Mental Health Program, was then held, in which the most important aspects of the WHO AIMS Report were evaluated and discussed.

The PAHO Mental Health Bulletin

In 2009 there will be some changes in the Bulletin to improve its quality and format for readers. Similarly, it has been decided that the Bulletin will be published every two months, with more extensive content in each issue. The next issue (the first of 2009) will come out in February.

The Team of the PAHO/WHO Regional Mental Health Program warmly wishes you a

Happy Holidays and Prosperous 2009!