

Inaugural address

by

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at

**Meeting of Technical Experts to discuss the Concept
of Mental Health Promotion and Prepare an
Outline of a background paper on the subject**

WHO/SEARO, New Delhi, India
14-15 October 2005

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Distinguished members of the Technical Experts Group, Colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

- It is with great pleasure that I welcome you all to this meeting.
- The subject of mental health promotion is rapidly assuming greater importance.
- During the last two decades, we have witnessed many changes in the world, in all directions, such as rapid globalization; trade liberalization; accelerated urbanization; as well as demographic, socio-cultural and political transitions.
- Simultaneously, we have seen significant technological advancements, improved communications, and the increasing involvement of multiple sectors in health development.
- Efficient management of change is critical nowadays, if we are to succeed in responding to the new and emerging demands for better health-care and services.

- In this context, promoting optimal human growth and development, and the maintenance of good health during one's lifetime has become an overriding priority in the development of health for all people.
- This is what we usually call "health promotion", in technical terms.
- Yet, there is a tendency in some areas of health programme formulation to place an emphasis on a disease-based model, rather than taking the positive domain of health in the development process.
- Generally, people recognize disease, which implies "bad health", rather than "good health", which is mostly taken for granted.
- These perceptions of the people need to be changed.
- Health promotion has to be made a key public health strategy for all sectors of society, if improved or better health status of the population is to be achieved.
- Health interventions should be pursued through "aggressive" rather than "passive" strategies.
- While saying this, one must also keep in mind that due attention has to be paid to providing the best treatment for the sick.

Ladies and gentlemen,

- The double burden of communicable and noncommunicable diseases can be effectively reduced by implementing appropriate health promotion programmes.
- In spite of substantial progress made in the area of health promotion in several countries, communities continue to suffer from preventable illnesses, including preventable mental and neurological disorders.

- In fact, rates of suicide, substance abuse and juvenile delinquency are increasing.
- It is therefore an opportune time now to take stock of the issues relating to this matter, and chalk out a suitable plan for our future endeavours.
- What is becoming increasingly clear is that we need more effective strategies for promoting mental health and mental well-being.
- The determinants of good mental health and the risk factors causing mental disorders have to be precisely identified.
- Information on these determinants and risks will be used as the basis for rational planning, and effective implementation of mental health promotion programmes.
- There is a substantial amount of knowledge and experience, in life-skills education for adolescents.
- But there is a dearth of information on the content in many aspects of mental health promotion that can lead to meaningful programme development and interventions.
- In addition, we need concrete evidence on the effectiveness of programme implementation in reducing morbidity due to mental disorders.
- Furthermore, sound strategies for mental health promotion must be formulated on the basis of specific socio-cultural contexts.
- For this, we also need the help of several disciplines, including sociology and social anthropology.

Colleagues,

- Many social determinants of mental health influence personal and group behaviours that affect the psychosocial environments of men and women.
- In other words, environmental conditions of individuals, families, and communities are affected by sets of social determinants.
- These pertinent points must be taken into full consideration when mental health promotion programmes are formulated through a multisectoral and multidisciplinary process.
- Development of communication strategies to promote and support dialogue in the matters relating to socio-cultural issues is necessary indeed.
- In addition, certain traditional practices, such as meditation, which have been used for centuries in this Region, are now acknowledged as being effective in promoting mental as well as physical well-being.
- Some of these practices have been proven to be effective.
- We may attentively consider selecting them for promoting mental health in the community.
- Messages and activities to promote mental health and mental well-being should really reach out to individuals; young and old, men and women, in places where they live and work.
- People and the community must clearly understand what is mental health promotion, what it means, and what are its essential elements.

- We need an effective package of evidence, knowledge, and information for education of people and the community.
- Ways and means must be devised to empower people and the community to be able to initiate and undertake interventions from their own perspectives.
- Realizing the concept of mental health promotion involves multiple partners.
- All stakeholders, including people and the community themselves, must come forward on their own initiatives, but in a well-coordinated and consonant manner.

Distinguished participants,

- It has been advocated that health must form a key component of good corporate practices.
- What has also to be ensured is that the private sector perceives the need to invest, not only in physical, but also in mental health.
- Evidence must be provided to demonstrate that mental health affects very significantly the productivity of the workforce.
- Creating awareness among policy-makers in countries of the paramount importance of mental health promotion is essential indeed.
- This will lead to the recognition and integration of mental health promotion activities in the national health care programmes, with adequate funding.
- Countries must see actions in health promotion, including mental health promotion, as justifiable social investments, that can contribute effectively to overall national development.

- The Regional Office is in the process of developing a Strategic Framework for pursuing public advocacy of mental health promotion as an area of highest priority.
- This has been done through consensus building among prominent professionals and experts from both within and outside the Region.
- At the same time, support is being provided for the preparation of country-specific plans, which will be consolidated into a regional working document for mental health promotion.
- This effort will lead to the formation of a regional network which promotes and facilitates intercountry cooperation in this area.
- It should also be mentioned that this mental health promotion exercise must be seen as a part and parcel of the recently-adopted Bangkok Charter on Health Promotion.

Ladies and gentlemen,

- In the process of promoting mental health within this framework, there are many formidable challenges that need to be tackled with unwavering determination.
- To be really effective in fulfilling our desire in this regard, we need new thinking, new ideas, new approaches, and real innovations in our work.
- My humble suggestion in this connection is that we focus on a few things first, then we do them well, with clear ideas of what we are doing and what is expected from our efforts.
- I would like to see that our attempts in this exercise also include, as integral elements, operational research or research-cum-action, which can provide us with further evidence for future action.

- I believe this meeting will fulfill its objective in identifying effective strategies for us to move forward confidently in the promotion of mental health and mental well-being.
- In addition, the meeting will come out with an outline background document, which will be discussed at a future intercountry meeting on this subject.
- I am sure this meeting will further strengthen WHO's initiative in supporting the governments of Member States in a much more efficient and effective manner, in their efforts to develop and implement their mental health promotion programmes.
- Finally, I wish you all success in your deliberations, and a very pleasant stay in New Delhi.
- Thank you.