Movement for global mental health gains momentum

This week, a Global Mental Health Summit is being held in Athens, Greece, co-sponsored by the Wellcome Trust, Global Initiative on Psychiatry, MacArthur Foundation, and *The Lancet*, as part of the World Congress of the World Federation for Mental Health. The summit is a key milestone in the efforts of the Movement for Global Mental Health, which aims to improve the care of people with mental illness worldwide. The movement is a global network of individuals and, to date, over 50 organisations support its mission. Evolving from a Series published in *The Lancet* in 2007, the movement has called for a scale-up of services for people with mental health disorders in developing countries, and aims to provide resources to support this complex task, with a particular focus on research in low-income and middle-income countries.

The Lancet is devoting today's issue to mental health to highlight challenges and achievements in the global campaign against mental illness. Mental health is a fast-growing discipline in high-income countries; mental illness accounts for over a third of the burden of illness in the UK, 40% of all disability, and is a major social problem. The Depression Report, published in 2006 by Richard Layard, suggested that for people with depression, cognitive-behavioural therapy is more clinically effective and cost effective than is medication alone. Although guidelines from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) recommend that such psychological therapy should be accessible to all people suffering from depression, chronic anxiety, and schizophrenia, treatment is often not available due to a shortage of therapists. In *The Lancet* today, this issue is revisited in a meta-analysis about the accuracy of clinical diagnosis of depression in primary care, reported by Alex Mitchell and colleagues, while David Kessler and co-workers have investigated the benefit of cognitive-behavioural therapy delivered online for patients with depression. Turning to other serious mental disorders, the contribution of antipsychotic drugs to excess mortality in patients with schizophrenia is assessed by Jari Tiihonen and colleagues.

In low-income and middle-income countries a huge gap exists between the needs of people with mental illness and the services that are available. Most low-income and middle-income countries devote less than 1% of their health expenditure to diagnosis and treatment of mental illness. For example, in China, psychiatry as a profession is in its infancy. Only 14 000 psychiatrists and psychologists serve a population of 1·3 billion, as many as 17·5% of whom have been estimated to have some kind of mental health problem. The burden of severe mental illness such as schizophrenia has remained constant in China, while disorders such as anxiety and depression have grown in prevalence in recent years. Greater attention to the delivery of mental health care, and indeed for comprehensive mental health legislation, will be needed in China and other developing countries.

The Movement for Global Mental Health has brought *The Lancet* together with independent scientists, including colleagues at WHO and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, who conduct research on interventions that could be used to improve mental health services in low-income and middle-income countries, namely low-cost treatments that are effective, affordable, and feasible. The movement seeks to raise awareness of mental health, and to tackle the stigma and discrimination that accompany mental illness, especially in marginalised and vulnerable groups. A number of barriers can be identified which challenge the scaling up of services for people with mental disorders, including the lack of a coherent and consensual advocacy campaign for mental health. Mental health promotion needs to be considered in the policies and plans of all governments, and in all parts of government, from health and education, through to justice, transport, environment, housing, and welfare.

Mental health is a central component of an individual's wellbeing, indivisible from physical health. Mental health must be one of the key priorities in any country's clinical and public health agenda. Examples of encouraging progress include WHO's Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP), which is developing guidelines for the treatment of eight mental, neurological, and substance use disorders. The World Psychiatric Association has completed a survey of its national and regional representatives to develop packages of care for people with mental disorders across the life course, which are likely to be released next year. We and other members of the Movement for Global Mental Health believe that mental health should take an equal place next to other great global health programmes of the day, including HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria. Join us. ■ *The Lancet*

The printed journal includes an image merely for illustration

iStockPhoto

See **Articles** pages 609, 620, and 628

For **the Movement for Global Mental Health** see http://www.globalmentalhealth.org/articles.html

For ***The Lancet* Series on Global Mental Health** see http://www.thelancet.com/series/global-mental-health

For **The Depression Report—a new deal for depression and anxiety disorders** see http://cep.lse.ac.uk/textonly/research/mentalhealth/DEPRESSION_REPORT_LAYARD2.pdf