

## from the PRESIDENT



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The focus for this issue of the Commonwealth Nurse is mental health. Mental ill health is the third leading cause of disease burden in the world, predicted to be the leading disease burden by 2030.

Mental ill health affects one in four people worldwide at some time in their life.

In 2010, the global economic impact of mental ill health was approximately US\$ 2.5 trillion and this cost is estimated to increase to US\$ 6 trillion by 2030. While mental ill health is typically left off the list of top NCDs, it alone accounts for over US\$ 16 trillion or one third of the overall US\$ 47 trillion anticipated spend on NCDs over the next 20 years.

According to the World Health Organisation:

- \* About half of mental disorders begin before the age of 14. Around 20% of the world's children and adolescents, regardless of culture, are estimated to have mental disorders or problems. Regions of the world with the highest percentage of population under the age of 19 have the poorest level of mental health resources.
- \* On average about 800,000 people commit suicide every year, 86% of them in low and middle income countries. Mental disorders are one of the most prominent and treatable causes of suicide.
- \* War and other major disasters have a large impact on mental health and psychosocial wellbeing. Rates of mental disorder tend to double after emergencies.
- \* Mental health issues are commonly co-morbidities of NCDs, infectious diseases and extreme poverty. They are frequently hidden, ignored or stigmatised. Mental disorders are a major risk factor for communicable and non-communicable disease. They can also contribute to unintentional and intentional injury.
- \* Stigma about mental disorders and discrimination against patients and families prevent people from seeking mental health care.
- \* Few countries have a legal framework that adequately protects the rights of people with mental disorders.

- \* There is huge inequity in the distribution of skilled human resources for mental health across the world. Shortages of psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses, psychologists and social workers are one of the main barriers to providing treatment and care in low and middle income countries. Low income countries have 0.05 psychiatrists and 0.42 nurses per 100,000 people. The rate of psychiatrists in high income countries is 170 times greater and for nurses is 70 times greater.
- \* Human rights violations of psychiatric patients are routinely reported in most countries. These include physical restraint, seclusion and denial of basic needs and privacy.

The World Health Organisation's Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020 was adopted on 27 May 2013 at the 66th World Health Assembly attended by Ministers of Health from 194 WHO Member States. The action plan has four major objectives:

- \* To strengthen effective leadership and governance for mental health,
- \* To provide comprehensive, integrated and responsive mental health and social care services in community-based settings,
- \* To implement strategies for promotion and prevention in mental health, and
- \* To strengthen information systems, evidence and research for mental health.

The plan sets important new directions for mental health including a central role for community based care and a greater emphasis on human rights. It moves away from a pure medical model, and addresses income generation and education opportunities, housing and social services and other social determinants of mental health. The action plan also emphasises the empowerment of people with mental disabilities; the need to develop a strong civil society and the importance of promotion and prevention activities. The document outlines specific actions for Member States, international, regional and national level partners, and includes several indicators and targets that can be used to evaluate implementation progress and impact.

Nurses need to be actively advocating for reform of mental health services. The research described on pages 4-6 clearly demonstrates how urgent the need is for reform in this area. I urge all CNF members to read the research and be actively involved in their countries response to the WHO Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020.

[http://www.who.int/mental\\_health/action\\_plan\\_2013/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/mental_health/action_plan_2013/en/index.html)