



WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY 2016 THEME BRIEF

The World Federation for Mental Health (WFMH) announces the theme for World Mental Health Day 2016:

Dignity in Mental Health - Psychological & Mental Health First Aid for All

The idea of a course in psychological first aid and prevention dates back to 1945 and was described as an active process of prevention and management of mild conditions applicable to all individuals (Blain, Hoch and Ryan 1945).

However, psychological first aid remained poorly understood globally, was not universally available and many people did not know that psychological first aid was possible until the resurgence of interest in mental health literacy in the 1990's (Jorm et al 1997). This led to the development of a mental health first aid training course evaluated in Australia in 2002 (Kitchener and Jorm 2002). A systematic review completed by the WHO in 2009 also showed the effectiveness of psychological first aid. The emerging evidence is that psychological and mental health first aid does work.

Many people who suffer from psychological and mental distress, personal crises and mental disorders can benefit from receiving psychological and mental health first aid from professionals and the general public.

One in four adults will experience mental health difficulties at one time or the other but many will receive little or no help when they present in an emergency. In contrast the majority of people with physical health difficulties who present in an emergency in a public or hospital setting will be offered physical health first aid.

Since the introduction of Basic Life Support (BLS) and Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) without equipment in the 1960's many people have benefitted from the intervention of a passer-by, and lives have been saved.

Mental health crises and distress are viewed differently because of ignorance, poor knowledge, stigma and discrimination. This cannot continue to be

allowed to happen, especially as we know that there can be no health without mental health. Psychological and mental health first aid should be available to all, and not just a few. This is the reason why the World Federation for Mental Health (WFMH) has chosen psychological and mental health first aid as its theme for World Mental Health Day 2016.

We know that psychological and mental health first aid is understood differently by different people in the mental health professions and the general public.

WFMH wants to develop a shared understanding of basic psychological and mental health first aid that will be understood worldwide by the general public, professionals, governments and non-governmental institutions (NGO's).

Our aim is that every member of the general public can:

- Learn how to provide basic psychological and mental health first aid so that they can provide support to distressed individuals in the same way as they do in physical health crises
- Address the stigma associated with mental ill-health so that dignity is promoted and respected
- Empower people to take action to promote mental health
- Spread understanding of the equal importance of mental and physical health and their integration in care and treatment
- To work with individuals and institutions to develop best practice in psychological and mental health first aid
- To provide culturally sensitive learning materials to increase the skills of the general public in administering psychological and mental health first aid.

Lessons need to be learnt from the way professionals and the general public have been involved in developing the skills required to deliver Basic Life Support (BLS) and Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR).

To deliver psychological and mental health first aid properly, training is not enough. There is also the need for mental health promotion and good access to health providers. The world is going through a crisis. There are many disasters and wars, migration is a growing problem and many people require basic psychological and mental health first aid to prevent their health from deteriorating and to empower them to take action to improve their mental health.

Every 40 seconds somebody somewhere in the world dies by suicide, and the young are disproportionately affected. Providing more people with basic psychological and mental health first aid skills will help to decrease the rate of suicide.

Psychological and mental distress can happen anywhere - in our homes, in our schools, in the workplace, on the transport system, in the supermarket, in public spaces, in the military and in hospital. Psychological and mental health first aid is a potentially life-saving skill that we all need to have.

Please support WFMH to make this a global reality so that we can make the world a better place.

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