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Ethiopia Marked World Mental Health Day



Dr. Tseaysina Gebreyesus, CEO of Emmanuel Hospital; W/ro Yezabnesh Tadesse, EMHS Chairperson; Dr. Atalay Alem, Former CEO of Emmanuel Hospital, Dr. Pascal Janda, WHO Representative a.i. [Panelists left to right]

WHO in Collaboration with The Ethiopian Federal Ministry of Health, Emmanuel Hospital, and Ethiopian Mental Health Society marked the World Mental Health Day on October 10, 2009 under the theme **“Mental Health in Primary Care: Enhancing Treatment and Promoting Mental Health”** in the Emmanuel Hospital premises. On the occasion participants include, officials from the Federal Ministry of Health, Amanuel Hospital, members of Ethiopian Mental Health Society, WHO, Health Professionals, development partners and other stakeholders.

This important occasion was not unique for Ethiopia only, it was rather marked worldwide. In his address to all member nations, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon called for donor support to treat mental disorders in developing countries. “Mental disorders contribute more to disease burden and disability in developing countries than any other category of non-communicable disease, yet only a small minority of people with mental disorders in these countries have access to mental health services. The need is high, and care is inadequate,” he said in a message marking the occasion. “Governments and public health organizations, civil society, multilateral agencies and donors must join hands to make this happen,” he added, noting that effective treatments exist for a wide variety of mental disorders.

In her opening remarks, Dr. Teshaysina Gebreyesus, Chief Executive Officer of Amanuel Hospital, welcomed participants and stressed the need for mental health in primary care. According to her mental health is the bottom-line for all kinds of health related issues as well as the very well being of mankind. She thanked all who came to the commemoration of the mental health day. “The hospital has been striving to expand mental health care in collaboration with stakeholders”, she added. Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Atalay Alem, former medical director of Amanuel mental hospital and currently lecturer at Addis Ababa University medical faculty, said mental disorders do not choose their victims, they occur in all cultures and at all stages of the life span. Close to 450 million people in the world are suffering from mental health problems, among which only 50 percent of them get access to medical treatment. Most of the people who suffer from mental disorder live in developing countries. Dr. Atalay said limited awareness about mental health and poverty are among the main causes that hinder the countries to provide the necessary medical treatment to people who experience mental health problems. Some 15 million people in Ethiopia need mental health care, he said.



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Dr. Pascal Mkanda, WHO Representative a.i, on his part addressed the gathering by reading the WHO Africa Region Director’s message which pointed out that the people of the WHO African Region are facing mental health problems some of which are increasing in magnitude especially as access to continuing and quality care is limited for a large number of people suffering from mental or neurological disorders or other disorders related to substance abuse particularly within the community and in peripheral health centres. According to the Regional Director’s message “nearly 80% of the people suffering from epilepsy, for the 34 million people consuming cannabis or “*khat*” on the continent, and for people suffering from undiagnosed depression particularly when the symptoms are somatic, access to adequate care in appropriate services remain limited”. “Furthermore” he added “for the large majority of people of all ages who are displaced or have become refugees as a result of conflicts or natural disasters, psychosocial management has yet to be initiated or strengthened in some cases”.

The Ethiopian Mental Health Society Chairperson, W/ro Yezabnesh Tadesse, thanked partners, namely Finland Embassy, Netherlands Embassy, WHO, and the host Emmanuel Hospital itself. Dr. Tseaysina joined W/ro Yezabnesh in thanking all partners. She stressed on WHO’s partnership with the hospital’s

psychiatric nursing school that enhances mental health the service delivery as an example.

Dr. Pascal finally told the participants that the WHO Regional director would, therefore, like to invite Member States (Ethiopia included) to update the various commitments made in the regional context in order to maintain achievements and help make significant progress in the area of mental health in our Region. It was also announced loud and clear that WHO will continue to provide the support needed to back up efforts to improve the mental health of all categories of people, especially the most vulnerable, because mental health is a fundamental cornerstone of well-being, and there is no health without mental health.

It is to be recalled that the World federation for Mental Health (WFMH) dedicated 10 October each year as a Mental Health Day. Due to limited available human and financial resources, community-based primary care facilities must be involved in delivering these services. Moreover, providing effective services in primary care settings would help to reduce the stigma associated with mental disorders and could prevent unnecessary hospitalization and human rights violations of people with mental health problems.



Patients at the hospital lit the candle light vigil with the guest of honor Dr. Pascal Mkanda WHO Representative a.i