

# WHO CALLS FOR COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICES TO ADDRESS MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Contributed by Angel Desai  
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The conclusion of the WHO's Global Forum for Community Mental Health in Geneva last month presented a consensus within the organization for the dissemination of a network of community mental health services among its member states. The Forum sought to address a increasing incidence of disorders related to mental health among developing countries in particular.

According to WHO officials, factors such as demographic change, natural disasters, internal and external conflict and socio-economic conditions have afflicted individuals living in the developing world disproportionately in terms of the mental health disorders these elements have engendered. In an unprecedented move, WHO organizers invited people living with mental disorders to the Forum, in an attempt to place a "face" on an issue which has been a focal point for global, social stigmatization.

Before the commencement of this Forum, WHO officials addressed mental health issues in 2001, citing it as an area of public health that has not been adequately confronted by member states. In an attempt to arrive at a resolution for improved worldwide services, the forum examined global models for mental health care, ultimately concluding that a network of community mental health services may provide more effective, and less exclusive services as compared to regional mental hospitals.

Dr. Catherine Le Galès-Camus, Assistant Director-General of WHO's cluster on Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health, stated in a WHO press release,

This topic should matter to everyone, because far too many people with mental disorders do not receive any care. The immediate challenge for low income countries is to use primary health care settings, particularly through community approaches that use low-cost, locally available resources to ensure appropriate care of these disorders... The challenge is to enhance systems of care by taking effective local models and disseminating them throughout a country.

The question that remains is whether this rhetoric will materialize on a local and rural level and more importantly, if these initiatives will prove to be feasible in a global setting. Reference

World Health Organization. (2007) Community mental health services will lessen social exclusion, says WHO. WHO Media Centre Notes