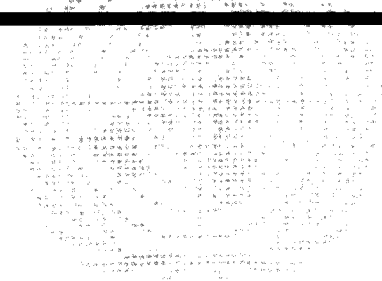




WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

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**WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY 2006:
'BUILDING AWARENESS - REDUCING RISKS:
SUICIDE AND MENTAL ILLNESS'**

The World Health Organization calls for improved treatment for mental illness to reduce suicide

Geneva | The World Health Organization (WHO) supports the World Federation for Mental Health's World Mental Health Day, 10 October 2006, which focuses this year on 'Building Awareness - Reducing Risk: Mental Illness and Suicide'. It calls attention to suicide as a leading cause of premature and preventable death. WHO recognizes the need to build awareness and reduce risks in the areas of suicide and, more broadly, mental illness.

'All too often, suicide represents a tragic consequence of failing to diagnose and treat serious mental illness', said Dr Anders Nordström, Acting Director-General of WHO, 'It requires a concerted public health response globally, nationally, and also from communities and families, to reduce suicide by reducing mental illness. World Mental Health Day is an important opportunity to recognize the magnitude of the problem, as well as the necessary steps towards the solutions.'

An estimated 873,000 people commit suicide every year, which represents 1.4% of the global burden of disease. The proportion of the global disease burden due to suicide varies regionally, from 0.2% in Africa up to 2.6% in the Western Pacific Region. Suicide among young people is of significant concern: in some regions, suicide is the third leading cause of death in the age group 15-35 years. Suicide is the leading cause of death for this age group in China and the second in the European region.

'More than 90% of all cases of suicide are associated with mental disorders such as depression, schizophrenia and alcoholism', notes Dr Benedetto Saraceno, Director of the Department of Mental Health for WHO, 'Therefore, reducing the global suicide rate means effectively addressing the serious and growing burden of mental illness around the world.'

At any time, 450 million people worldwide are affected by mental, neurological or behavioral problems, and the rate is steadily rising. In spite of existing knowledge about effective treatments for most psychiatric disorders, huge gaps in treatment and resources exist. For example, a recent WHO study in 14 countries showed that, in developing countries, between 76 to 85% of serious cases of mental illness did not receive any treatment within the prior year. Furthermore, data from the WHO Mental Health Atlas 2005 show a tremendous human resource gap in the developing regions of the world.

In order to effectively address these gaps, mental health policy, plans and legislation must be integrated into national health systems. Promoting mental health, preventing mental disorders, mainstreaming cost-effective interventions in primary health care, promoting community care, and engaging with local communities should be key components of national mental health plans and policies.

WHO provides guidance to reduce the burden of mental disorders and suicide worldwide. WHO has initiated a global action program to assist countries to create and implement coherent and comprehensive mental health policies, plans and legislation, and to ensure adequate mental health care is available at the community level, including development of human resources for mental health.

LINKS:

World Mental Health Day 2006: World Federation of Mental Health website:

<http://www.wfmh.com/wmhd2006.htm>

WHO Mental Health website

http://www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/suicide/suicideprevent/en/

Mental Health Atlas 2005

http://www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/atlas/

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