Mental Health a Top Priority in the Pacific

The Pacific Health Ministers gathered in Apia, Samoa for their 10th Meeting from 2-4 July 2013, to discuss the priority health issues in the region. Mental health was raised as a concerning top priority for the Pacific countries, with numerous issues and opportunities identified to progress in this area over the next 2 years.

Seven recommendations for mental health hailed from this meeting, including:

- strengthening national leadership, evidence, human resources, service delivery, combating stigma, addressing root causes, mental health promotion, mental illness and suicide prevention.

Our health leaders agreed to strengthen networking amongst and within countries, bringing together leaders, providers, consumers and families to share experiences, resources, and support through avenues such as PIMHnet.

Stay tuned for mental health updates in the region, network activities, awareness-raising, training opportunities and more MINDING YOUR HEALTH, the Pacific Way!

PIMA is Back in Action!!

Bula Vinaka/Talofa Lava/Malo ni/Malo e lelei/Kia Orana/ Fakaalofa atu/ Mauri/ Bonjour/ Hello and welcome to PIMHnet's quarterly newsletter! One of our many threads to keep us connected.

With Dr Yutaro Setoya positioned as PIMHnet facilitator, PIMHnet is in action and many activities including the PIMHnet meeting in September is planned for this year.

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The World Health Organization Regional Office for the Western Pacific (WPRO) and Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) convened a joint meeting focusing on non communicable diseases (NCDs) in the Pacific from 23-26 September 2013 in Auckland, New Zealand. The meeting titled, “Fifth Pacific NCD Forum: Political Commitment to Resilient Action,” focused on translating global and regional commitments into resilient actions at regional and country levels.

The Forum discussed resilient actions within the areas of tobacco control, alcohol harm reduction, food and nutrition standards (with a focus on salt reduction), physical activity standards, strengthening health systems through primary health care (PEN), and the current status and future directions for NCD surveillance.

The Forum built upon the prioritized Crisis Response Packages (CRP) of very cost-effective NCD strategies for implementation, developed by the PICTs at the Fourth Pacific NCD Forum in 2012. One of the objectives discussed by the 41 participants was progress and ways forward with primary health care through the Package of Essential NCD (PEN) interventions.

Ms Brooke Conway from the WHO Representative Office in Samoa and Dr Temo Waqanivalu from the WHO South Pacific Office in Fiji presented on the linkages between depression and NCDs and countries discussed PEN in the Pacific as an opportunity for an integrated approach to incorporate mental health assessment and services within the primary health care model.

Building on the momentum from the recent Pacific Health Ministers Meeting in July and other commitments to scale up mental health activities, the Forum participants agreed to consider integrating mental health into existing NCD programmes where possible and encouraged more intersectoral approaches.
Pacific Youth discuss Mental Health in Sport

The Pacific Youth and Sports Conference (PYASC) was held on 2-7 December 2013 in Noumea, New Caledonia. The meeting was convened by the Oceanía Football Federation, the Government of New Caledonia and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and acts as a platform to talk about Sport for Development, to foster successful relationships between youth organisations, sporting bodies, government agencies, NGOs and partners.

Health issues were addressed as part of sustainable development, and youth mental health was a topic of fruitful and insightful discussion. Psychiatrist Dr Lisi Petaia, presented on mental health issues in Pacific youth, touching on suicide, alcohol and drug abuse, as well as teen pregnancy, linkages between mental health promotion/prevention and NCD and violence prevention initiatives.

Youth representatives keenly supported mental health promotion through sport, noting the need for more education, awareness and support programmes dedicated to young people.

One thousand young people represented 25 countries and areas in the Pacific in this unique opportunity to exchange experiences and work cooperatively towards solutions.

Cook Islands holds Mental Health Training in Rarotonga

From Cook Islands News. In the sixth Rarotonga mental health workshop held from December 3 to 6, the work of the Te Kainga Mental Health Trust along with mental health and illness was discussed by front line staff.

Mental illness is seen as the hidden disease, where it’s not openly talked about and Te Kainga has worked to reduce the stigma attached to mental illness.

“Mental health is integrated into a fully resourced holistic health problem, accessible to all Cook Islanders, resulting in the elimination of stigma,” said founder and chair person of the trust, Mereana Taikoko.

The trust views holistic or all encompassing health as a combination of social, emotional, mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing, noting links between mental illnesses and biological, psychological and sociological factors.

The trust identified the top five mental health problems they have come across as: stress, grief, care-givers’ stress, depression and alcohol.
Abundant Life
by
Teagan Moore

This is the badge I wore (below) at the recent Youth camp program. You can imagine my dismay at the name of my awesome team. Sheesh.. depressing. Next time we'll call ourselves "Faataua le Ola" - Value Life.

Logistics with the organized counselors to facilitate the workshop on depression and suicide fell through so I was up to take the lead. We had 130 youth from around Samoa going through various stations covering youth issues. In a calm, robotic, and gentle way, I had 15 minutes to tell my story. I had shared it once before when I was accepted to be the face & a Board Member of Faataua le Ola (FLO) a non-government organization addressing depression and suicide in Samoa. By the time the 5th group came around in the youth workshop, I started to cry.

My younger brother was depressed at 16yrs old. I often thank God for the teacher that referred him to the counselor. After he asked me whether those who take their own lives go to hell, he told me he had attempted to take his life. I was upset, confused and angry, and shared this with my parents while he kept seeing the counselor. A few years later my good friend from church took her own life while battling depression. I was so angry at her and never forgave myself for not doing more. It was not until earlier this year when I ran for Miss Samoa 2013 where I began to voice youth issues. I did a drama & dance portraying this life-changing event and my own battle with depression.

While my brothers battled with illegal drugs & mental illness, I was prescribed sleeping pills. I thought one night, best if I take them all so I can have a good long sleep. Or maybe go swimming and make it look like I drowned. After being diagnosed with a bipolar disorder and being on mood-stabilizing medication for half a year, I found renewed faith, courage, and love in my family, friends, and church. With a plan in place and completed therapy, I came off the medication. That was nearly three years ago. All glory to God and His amazing grace and love. Know the waves will calm down, the feelings will pass, speak up and ask for help you are loved and made for a purpose. There is life. Abundant life.

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