Mental Health Policy and Plan Workshop was held at Nadi, Fiji on the 26th to the 28th of October 2015. Participants from the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Republic of Marshall Islands and Vanuatu attended the workshop along with four consultants from Geneva, Sydney and Suva. The countries were asked to hold a stakeholder meeting and to prepare a draft policy before coming to this workshop.

The aim of the workshop was to develop the capacity of the participants in writing policy and to finalize each country’s draft policy. Dr Michelle Funk and Dr Yutaro Setoya from WHO provided technical updates on mental health policy and plan, including human rights issues. Following the overview of the draft policy from each country, the attendees were broken down into 4 small working groups, each facilitated by one of the consultants, to discuss country-specific concerns and revise the draft accordingly.

“The small group workshop is an efficient working method” Dr Funk stated. “It was much more effective to work in an intensive workshop than it is to communicate via email. It is a method we will continue to use”. Utilizing knowledge gained and learning from other countries, each of the four participant countries finalized a draft policy and action plan to be submitted for endorsement to their respective countries, which are expected to be launched in 2016.

WHO hopes to conduct similar small group policy writing workshops with the remaining countries in the PIMHnet in need of revision of the mental health policy and plan.
The Ministry of Health and Medical Services (MoHMS) together with Lifeline Fiji came together to commemorate World Suicide Prevention Day on the 10th of September 2015. The theme was ‘Reaching Out and Saving Lives’.

Community mobilization in support of a unified stand in combatting suicide was seen in the Western, Northern and Central divisions, which included a successful march from the Flea Market to Ratu Sukuna Park in Suva, followed by awareness raising campaigns to prevent suicide.

The march was led by the Hon. Minister for Health & Medical Services Mr Jone Usamate and the Hon. Madam Speaker for Parliament Mrs Jiko Luveni followed by individuals from various organisations who joined in the march- and post-march activities.

Mr Usamate highlighted mental health and wellness as a priority for the MoHMS. “In Fiji we tend to shy away from discussing mental illness and it is almost a taboo subject. Suicide is having a major impact on the lives of Fijians so such taboos must be eliminated and the matter must be addressed transparently and without any stigma attached”, Mr Usamate said.

Following the success of World Suicide Prevention Day, the MoHMS, supported by the WHO Mental Health Action Plan (2013-2020), implemented the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Policy, ensuring that suicide remains preventable and that seeking help can be a life-saving action.
mhGAP Implementation in the Pacific

Pacific Island countries have very few mental health specialists and access to specialized services is often challenging due to the remoteness of many Pacific islands.

mhGAP is beneficial to people suffering with mental disorders and has demonstrated that through proper care, psychosocial assistance and access to medication, prevention and treatment is possible. People with concerns can contact their nearest health facility where mhGAP trained health staff treat and manage them at the primary care level, with support and supervision from the mental health specialists.

14 Pacific countries (Cook Islands, Fiji, FSM, Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga and Vanuatu) have begun the progressive implementation of mhGAP since 2013, training more than 800 doctors and nurses.

Kiribati’s only mental health doctor, Dr Mireta Noere, recognizes the success of mhGAP saying that “through mhGAP training, the management of mental health patients around Kiribati has greatly improved. Kiribati has seen less referral from outer islands to the main hospital and better collaboration with them in terms of treatment and advice on mental health issues”.

Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP)

A WHO programme aimed at scaling up services for mental, neurological and substance use disorders with a focus on low- and middle-income countries. In order to address the lack of mental health specialists including psychiatrists, mental health nurses and psychologists, mhGAP targets general doctors and nurses at the primary and secondary health care settings. They are trained in the assessment and management of common mental health conditions, like psychosis, depression, suicide and alcohol use disorders.
WHO plans to continue implementing mhGAP training in 2016 and beyond. To expand the delivery of mhGAP training in the region, an online version using Pacific Open Learning Health Net (POLHN) is currently under development.

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