On World Mental Health Day (10 OCT), the WHO Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP) Forum commenced the annual meeting inviting Member States, mhGAP implementers, universities, WHO collaborating centers, NGOs, and civil society. Over 200 people celebrated the World Mental Health Day and participated in the forum.

This event was marked by the release of the 2.0 version of the mhGAP Intervention Guide. The updated version is based on new evidence, as well as extensive feedback and recommendations from all WHO regions who have used mhGAP-IG Version 1.0. The key updates include: content update in various sections based on new evidence; design changes for enhanced usability; a streamlined and simplified clinical assessment that includes an algorithm for follow-up; inclusion of two new modules - Essential Care and Practice that includes general guidelines and Implementation module to support the proposed interventions by necessary infrastructure and resources; and, revised modules for Psychoses, Child and Adolescent Mental and Behavioral Disorders and Disorders due to Substance Use.

The forum also launched a one-year campaign for World Health Day 2017, focusing on: “Depression: let’s talk.” The aim of the campaign is to better inform the public about the causes and consequences of depression, and what help is available for prevention and treatment. The core of the campaign is to encourage dialogue so those affected are more likely to seek and get help. Link.

World Mental Health Day was also celebrated in many countries across the Pacific. For example in Fiji the World Health Day celebration was held in Lautoka to raise awareness in Fiji’s second largest city. Festivities included a large procession throughout the city led by a marching band. Dr Yutaro Setoya made speech on behalf of the WHO on the theme of “Dignity in Mental Health: Psychological and Mental Health First Aid for All!”. Additionally, two university students spoke about bipolar disorder and anxiety.

In Kiribati, the celebration was held at the newly opened Community Mental Health Wellness Center, Kainikatikun Te Marurung, and the Minister for Health, Honourable Mr Kobebe Taitai opened the celebration and launched the “Mental Health Policy and Strategic Plan 2016-2020”.

In Vanuatu, various community and school outreach activities were organized prior to the official celebration. School children created posters on their understanding of what causes stress and anxiety. Information booths were set up in Centre Point, USP and the Vila Central Hospital where participants could complete the Kessler K10 Mental Health Scale and seek consultation. Radio Vanuatu also participated in raising mental health awareness by inviting specialists to cover a variety of issues and answer caller questions.
A training for the Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP) was held July 27 to 29, 2016 at the Palau Royal Resort, hosted by the Behavioural Health Division of Ministry of Health. It was facilitated by Dr Jasmine Vergara from the Behavioural Health Division, Ministry of Health, Palau and Dr Yutaro Setoya from WHO South Pacific.

The workshop participants were doctors and nurses from governmental and private clinics who do not specialize in mental health, primary health workers, school counsellors, community partners and health service providers. The objective was to build capacity across multiple disciplines on assessment and management of common mental disorders in different settings to increase access to mental health service.

Also, building partnerships between specialized and non-specialized health workers helps create a network for sharing information and ideas to close the gap in mental health resources.

According to Everlynn Temengil, Chief Administrator of the Behavioural Health Division, the training equipped non-specialist primary health care workers to identify mental health conditions such as alcohol related disorders and depression, and to provide appropriate interventions at their skill-level. Alice Sbal, a psychosocial rehabilitation specialist who participated in the workshop, said that she learned vital steps for problem solving and empowering clients.

Participants closed the training with a better understanding of mental health issues and the vision to increase services for people with mental health and substance use disorders in Palau.
The Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) with the support of the WHO commenced the first regional training on mental health and human rights on the 24th of October, 2016. The three-day training emphasized the importance and need for a human rights-based approach to mental health when it comes to protecting, respecting and fulfilling patient rights—to enable the right to recovery and the highest attainable standard of health.

The training was facilitated by Dr Peter McGovern (UK) and Dr Carmen Valle (CBM International). There were seven regional participants (Federated State of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu) and 12 participants from Fiji (MoH mental health, Fiji National University, Psychiatric Survivors Association, Empower Pacific, Youth Champ 4 Mental Health, and Spinal Injury Association).

In order to understand the foundation of international human rights, participants were familiarized with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948. Through interactive discussion, participants analysed the relationship between rights and the consequences of human rights violations. Ideas were shared on which safeguards and practices can be enacted to ensure and defend human rights.

The second module narrowed in on promoting human rights in mental health for persons with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities by examining the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006 (CRPD). This module strongly focused on understanding the legal capacity of individuals with disabilities, freedom from violence and abuse, and empowerment through a human rights model.

The third module familiarized participants with the role of mental health and other related services, practitioners, family and community, and the individual in promoting the right to health and recovery. In doing so, they had to understand the key components of and barriers to recovery.

The project expects to launch in 6 countries.
Mental Health Policy Development in Tonga

On 27 September 2016, more than 50 mental health stakeholders (Tonga Ministry of Health (Psychiatric Unit, Director of Health, Medical Superintendent, public health unit, health promotion unit, pharmacy etc.), Ministry of Internal Affairs, Police, Tonga Prisons, Tonga family health association, Nau Alamaite Tonga Association, Tonga Mental Health and Disability Association, Mango Tree Service, Women and Children Crisis Center, Salvation Army, Tonga Red Cross Society etc.) attended the workshop for the development of the Tonga’s first Mental Health Policy and Strategic Plan. The meeting was opened by the Director of Health, Dr Siale ‘Akau’ola.

Participants were familiarized with the Global and Regional Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020 to understand the necessary steps to develop the mental health policy and emphasizing the importance of human rights for people with mental disorders. Following, Dr Mapa Puloka reported on the current mental health situation in Tonga, including the results from the newly developed WHO proMIND (mental health situation analysis).

Participants then discussed the priorities, gaps, and specific activities of four different domains: (1) leadership, governance, and finance, (2) information systems, evidence and research, (3) Mental health and social care services, including human resource, and (4) promotion and prevention, and awareness raising.

The recommendations of the stakeholders were refined over the next 3 days where the core drafting group discussed and drafted the Tonga National Mental Health and Strategic Plan 2016-2021.

The first draft will go through further consultation and revision, and will be submitted for endorsement.

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