

World Federation for Mental Health: Worldwide grassroots advocacy fighting for dignity in mental health.

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Introduction

The World Federation for Mental Health (WFMH) has been a leading reference in the mental health advocacy movement since its foundation in 1948. As the only worldwide grassroots advocacy and public education organization in the mental health field, its mission is "to advance, among all peoples and nations, the prevention of mental and emotional disorders, the proper treatment and care of those with such disorders, and the promotion of mental health" (WFMH, 2016. Retrieved from <http://wfmh.com/index.php/about-wfmh>).

In October 2015, the 42nd President of the World Federation for Mental Health (WFMH),

Professor Gabriel Ivbijaro, was elected and a very ambitious WFMH Business Plan for 2015-2017 was approved, based on the basic principle of promoting "Dignity in Mental Health".

In fact, this represents the core value of WFMH, and is the base of all activities the Federation has been promoting throughout the years.

This article will present a brief history of WFMH, and focus on WFMH three main projects: the World Mental Health Day; the Dignity Project and "The Great Push".

BRIEF HISTORY

The history of the World Federation for Mental Health can be traced back to the beginning of last century when Clifford Beers, a former psychiatric patient who had suffered abuse within mental institutions, founded the National Committee for Mental Hygiene in 1910, and the International Committee for Mental Hygiene (ICMH) in 1919.

In 1947, the ICMH agreed to change their name to the WFMH and its original purpose focused on mental hospital reform was expanded to "a new purpose to promote among all peoples and nations the highest possible level of mental health in its broadest biological, medical, educational, and social aspects".

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The Federation is an international membership organization with members and contacts in over 150 countries on six continents. Its organizational and individual membership includes mental health workers of all disciplines, consumers of mental health services, family members, and concerned citizens allowing a concrete collaboration among governments and non-governmental organizations to advance the cause of mental health services, research, and policy advocacy worldwide. The founding principles of the WFMH are reflected in WFMH activities such as the World Mental Health Day, the Dignity Project and "The Great Push that will be now presented." (WFMH, 2016)

WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY

The World Mental Health Day was first celebrated on 10 October 1992 and since then 10 of October has grown significantly to be now considered the world's most highly recognized global mental health advocacy program, celebrated in many countries worldwide.

The World Mental Health Day is a day for global mental health education, awareness and advocacy, with thousands of supporters worldwide observing an annual awareness program to bring attention to mental illness and its major effects on people's lives worldwide.

The creator of the idea was WFMH Deputy Secretary General Richard Hunter during Professor

Max Abbott's Presidency. Richard Hunter considered that mental health concerns would be recognized as an integral part of overall health, and he felt that the mission of WFMH was to seek parity for mental health alongside physical health. Since 1994 the WFMH Secretariat developed the concept of an annual theme, with the Federation developing a packet of information, translated into six languages at various times, that can be sent to everyone, free of cost, to allow them to follow the theme in their own way, holding local events.

Throughout the years national and international authorities joined in, organizing large countrywide campaigns for public education, and events have been held in countless cities and countries around the globe. The United Nations, the World Health Organization, the Pan American Health Organization and hundreds of national and international mental health groups are known to have celebrated World Mental Health Day.

According to Franciosi & Abbott (WFMH, 2016), "Richard Hunter and the WFMH saw that an international World Mental Health Day could be, in his words, "a focal point around which global mental health advocacy could gain maximum public attention". We will continue to work towards the dream of making mental health a priority for everyone, everywhere, by continuing the tradition of World Mental Health Day as one of our signature programs for years to come".

Filipa Palha, in the UPA Awards ceremony, with Gabriel Ibrkaro, president WFMH and Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, President Republic of Portugal (left).



**2016 WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY
THEME: DIGNITY IN MENTAL HEALTH-
PSYCHOLOGICAL & MENTAL HEALTH
FIRST AID FOR ALL**

This year's theme for World Mental Health Day was 'Dignity in Mental Health-Psychological & Mental Health First Aid for All', which aimed to contribute "to the goal of taking mental health out of the shadows so that people in general feel more confident in tackling the stigma, isolation and discrimination that continues to plague people with mental health conditions, their families and carers" (WFMH, 2016).

The material to support this year's campaign was developed by WFMH members and many international contributors from all over the globe, including Senior representatives of MHFA, the WHO and members of the World Dignity project. The material was made available globally, free of charge, in WFMH website allowing the Federation to offer to the world something useful to every man and woman in the street. Such capacity reaffirmed WFMH relevance not only to institutions but also to many individuals all over the world.

The importance of mental and psychological first aid to promote dignity in mental health was clearly explained by Professor Ivbijaro:

"At least one in four adults will experience mental health difficulties at one time or the other but many will receive little or no help when they

present in an emergency. In contrast the majority of people with physical health difficulties who present in an emergency in a public or hospital setting will be offered physical health first aid. Since the introduction of Basic Life Support (BLS) and Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) without equipment in the 1960's many people have benefited from the intervention of a passer-by, and lives have been saved. Mental health crises and distress are viewed differently because of ignorance, poor knowledge, stigma and discrimination.

This cannot continue to be allowed to happen, especially as we know that there can be no health without mental health. Psychological and mental health first aid should be available to all, and not just a few. This is the reason why the WFMH has chosen Psychological and Mental Health First Aid as its theme for World Mental Health Day 2016" (WFMH, 2016, p. 4).

A "Call to Action" was developed and spread worldwide asking everyone's contribute to make psychological and mental health first aid available to all as a global priority.

DIGNITY PROJECT

As President-Elect, Professor Ivbijaro embraced a wonderful project, the "Dignity

Filipa Palha and Ricardo Guizes, meeting with leaders in Mental Health in Portugal.



Project”, resulting on the creation of a symbol that represents dignity in mental health.

As Professor Ivbijaro explained: “every human interaction represents an opportunity for one person to treat another with dignity — a dignity encounter. Individuals and families affected by mental illness can often describe what dignity should look like. Sadly, however, most experience something wholly different. The stigmas of mental illness can no longer be tolerated. We can no longer be bystanders. We must do something.

People with mental health difficulties, their families, careers, governments, NGO’s (non-governmental organizations), professionals of all kinds and the associations that represent them would like all encounters to result in a positive dignity experience. To make dignity in mental health a reality requires every member of society to work together and make mental health visible, not something to be ashamed of. This is what the Dignity Project is all about.

The voice of people with mental health difficulties needs to be heard. There is no health without mental health but there is no single, universally recognized symbol to represent mental health.

Every human interaction holds the potential to be a dignity encounter, an interaction in which dignity comes to fore and may be positive or negative.

The inspiration for a global mental health symbol that represents dignity in mental health has been developed using stories from all over the world provided by people who have experienced mental health difficulties, their relatives and careers.

The International Conference, Mental Health for All – Connecting People and Sharing Experience held in Lille, France in 2015 has provided an opportunity for the World Federation for Mental Health (WFMH), its French Partners, friends and allies to work with a global branding organization, ModalPeople and the Edo Agency to explore the notion of dignity in mental health.

ModalPeople has co-coordinated research that has informed the inspiration for the design for the World Dignity Project working with people who have experienced mental health difficulties, their relatives, careers and friends living in Australia, Brazil, Chile, France, India, Israel, Mexico, Nigeria, Portugal, Singapore, Slovenia, Uganda, United Kingdom and the United States of America.

The World Dignity Project was launched to the general public worldwide in 2016, and aims to identify one million individuals, organizations, countries and states to become Foundation Members by adopting the World Dignity Project Symbol so that we can form a global movement to address the stigma related to mental health” (<http://worlddignityproject.com>).

Filipa Paiva and Ricardo Guinza, meeting with leaders in Mental Health in Portugal, including Gabriel Ivbijaro, President WFMH.



Great Push for Mental Health

The Great Push was founded in 2009 after the many "world reports" concerning mental health had failed to result in action (eg. "USA Surgeon General's Report (2000)", the "WHO World Health Report (2001)"), with the purpose of promoting mental health internationally, influence governments to create change and improve treatment and conditions for the mentally ill.

Vikram Patel, Martin Prince and Professor John Copeland (then WFMH president at the time) met in 2009 to draw up a campaign for action, which resulted in "the Great Push for Mental Health in strategic alliance with the Movement for Global Mental Health" centred on "Unity, Visibility, Rights and Recovery". The WFMH board approved it as a Federation Programme. The Great Push campaign gathered over 500 organisations from 104 countries in support of the action and reported to ministers at a meeting in New York before the UN Assembly. Those ministers with others then lobbied the UN Secretary-General for a Mental Health Action Plan. The supporters of the Great Push were then asked on what they wanted contained in the Action Plan and sent the results to WHO. The resulting WHO Mental Health Action Plan was very close to what organisations wanted and therefore WFMH could give it full support. What the organisations said

they wanted was published as the "People's Charter for Mental Health" approved by the WFMH Board. The results were also published in the journal "World Psychiatry".

The Charter defined Five Goals for mental health to achieve: 1. Convening a United Nations General Assembly Special Session for Mental Health; 2. Accepting that the five major noncommunicable diseases affecting world health should include mental, neurological and substance use disorders; 3. That mental health and well-being should be recognised as essential components of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's); 4. Mental health should be represented on all Disaster Emergency Committees; 5. That the WHO Comprehensive Action Plan be implemented expeditiously by all countries.

A further approach to the organisations supporting the Great Push resulted in 417 organisations in 88 countries supporting the Five Goals.

The next most important goal in the Charter is to have a UN Special Session devoted entirely to promoting mental health, which is not an easy goal to be achieved. Some steps are being done in that direction. Last April, an important joint World Bank/World Health Organisation (WHO) meeting was held in Washington DC USA entitled 'Out of the



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Shadows: Making Mental Health a Global Development Priority’.

The Great Push project continues working to meet its goals, and welcomes new supporters to join the cause.

As a final remark, the WFMH, as the only worldwide grassroots advocacy and public education organization in the mental health field, has an enormous potential to lead a global movement to promote dignity in mental health. We all know that we embrace a great challenge always hampered by stigma and discrimination. But we believe that one day the world will understand the outrageous individual and social price we are all paying for not dealing with mental health as we do with physical health.

In fact, the message is very simple: “there is no health without mental health”.

References

- Franciosi, P. & Abbott, M. (2016). WFMH Campaigning for World Mental Health Day. In WFMH (Eds.). Dignity in Mental Health. Psychological & Mental Health First Aid For All (pp. 13-14). Retrieved from <http://wfmh.com/reports/2016-07%20WFMH%20DIGNITY%20IN%20MENTAL%20HEALTH.pdf>
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Coffee break in the meeting at the Catholic University, Porto, Portugal.

