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MHE comments on the issue of Patients' Access to Information

No health without mental health!

Mental Health Europe believes that patients' right to access information is crucial for the promotion of mental health and well-being for all, for the following reasons:

- **Taking the mental health dimension into account:** information should be accurate, reliable, and "handled with care". Providing misleading or incomplete information as well as communicating it poorly can negatively affect patients' mental health. In particular, the information provided should avoid generating unrealistic expectations or false beliefs about patient's own health, treatment and care. Evidence shows that patients having realistic expectations are likely to cope better with their own health problems. Consequently, it is essential that provision of information leads to shared expectations between professionals and patients.
- **Respect and non-discrimination:** patients with mental health problems should not be treated and provided information with in a different way than mentally health people.
- **Effective communication** is a key element of health information work for it helps build a dynamic relationship between the health professional and the patient. Such a relationship is needed in order to enable patients to make responsible choices and decisions about their health.
- The key principle of **starting where people are at** is the prerequisite to build a good relationship between the health professional and his/her patient. Good communication skills such as empathy, unconditional positive regard and genuineness (congruence) are central features of a good relationship and key conditions for positive change.
- It is important to deploy a **person-centred approach**. This is particular true in a European context, where partners from different countries and with different cultural and professional backgrounds come together.
- It is essential to assess whether the information will not infringe key **ethical principles** (see for instance Seedhouse's ethical grid, 1991), such as:

- The patients' autonomy and freedom of choice: people should be supplied with useful information enabling them to make their own judgments both on the health treatment and on their health status. The needs and opinions of the patients should be respected.
- Privacy and confidentiality must be guaranteed. The patients should be always asked for specific permission to pass on their information to others, including intimates and carers. Informing the patient first is crucial. Only patients who know their records can give meaningful permission.
- Non-maleficence (doing no harm) and beneficence (working for the benefit of the individual) aspects have to be looked at carefully in patient information. The information offered should not be harmful to the patients' mental and physical health.