



MENTAL HEALTH EUROPE – SANTE MENTALE EUROPE aisbl
Boulevard Clovis 7, B-1000 Brussels
Tel +32 2 280 04 68 - Fax +32 2 280 16 04
E-Mail: info@mhe-sme.org
www.mhe-sme.org

EC thematic conference under the European Pact for Mental Health and Well-being

**“PREVENTION OF DEPRESSION AND SUICIDE – MAKING IT HAPPEN”
Budapest, 10-11 December 2009**

MENTAL HEALTH EUROPE’S VIEWS

Many speakers at this important event have focused in their intervention on the severe consequences of not undertaking action to prevent depression and suicide. Some underlined the economic burden, others focused on determinants and risk factors of depression and suicide, many spoke about policies and strategies, and a few people with experience of depression have been invited to take the floor.

We have been reminded that depression and depression-related problems are among the most pressing public health concerns, that they account for more than 7% of all estimated ill health and premature mortality in Europe.

We know that the mental health of adolescents and young people is often affected by a variety of factors (family, school, social and economic status as well as poverty and deprivation). Other factors that constitute a threat to young people’s mental health include exposure to violence, abuse, stress, drug or alcohol abuse, loss of important people in their lives, whether through death or divorce. We know that this can lead to a range of problems, ranging from behavioural problems to severe illnesses such as eating disorders, depression and suicide. We know that single parents and older people are at a greater risk of developing depression.

The European Commission’s DG Sanco Director General Robert Madelin already in 2004 took the initiative to request from a group of experts a report on “Actions against depression”. Mental Health Europe’s Senior Policy Adviser John Henderson and other MHE related experts were involved in the writing of this report.

The report built on a whole range of past and current mental health related activities under the programme for Community Action in the field of public health. They focus on better information about the mental health of the population as well as on the promotion of good mental health and the prevention of mental disease. It presented evidence base and areas for effective interventions. It identified some of the challenges in developing promotion and prevention strategies and possible solutions. And finally it presented conclusions and suggestions for the way forward.

The main conclusion of the report was “The cost of not taking action on depression is too great. Doing nothing is not an option”.

What has happened since the publication of this report in 2004?

How many of the following 7 recommendations have been implemented in the EU Member States?

- 1) Take action against depression as one part of a comprehensive public mental health approach
- 2) Implement actions throughout the life cycle: from early years, childhood, early adulthood, working age and older age
- 3) Take a multi-level and multi-sector approach in early identification and detection of prevention; work at the primary care level, public education, development of self-help programmes. But also set up training programmes and in-service training for health and social workers
- 4) Introduce mental health promotion to increase understanding and awareness of depression
- 5) Support the collection and dissemination of evidence
- 6) Collect national data and information on incidence and trends in depressive illness
- 7) Report to the Commission on these recommendations.

There have been a number of good awareness raising projects such as the "European Alliance Against Depression", presented in one of the parallel sessions.

Mental Health Europe has been carrying out several "good practices in mental health promotion" projects in this field, in collaboration with other organizations and universities. All were funded under the Public Health Programmes.

Their conclusions and recommendations have certainly reached a number of people, and policy-makers who otherwise would never have paid any attention to this issue.

But what do we see nowadays? The financial and economic crisis is used by a number of Member States as an alibi for budget cuts, in the provision of community-based care and in the funding of awareness-raising campaigns. The current economic and financial crisis affects the mental health of the population in all European Union Member States. More and more people suffer from depression and in some countries the suicide rates are increasing at an incredible speed. And given the number of people suffering from fear and anxiety disorders and burn-out syndromes, it is expected that they will continue to increase the following years.

Big national and international companies treat employees and workers as puppets on a string. Under the cloak of "flexibility" - a key-word nowadays on the workforce - they expect people to move from the north to the south, from the east to the west, to accept completely new jobs, etc etc.

They don't show any respect for the individual worker's home situation, for his or her vulnerability.

Multi-national companies play disgusting games, threatening to close plants and leaving workers during months, sometimes years, in complete uncertainty about their job, about their future.

We have all heard and seen the consequences recently, no need to name these companies.

How can we stop this?

How can we teach entrepreneurs to adopt an ethical attitude?

How can we make them reflect on the consequences of their decisions for the individual's mental health and well-being, and not only for their own wallet?

We should perhaps stop preaching to the converted and address new groups of people, those who have the power – financially, economically, politically.

Would it be an idea to organize a high-level awareness raising event for CEOs of multi-nationals, organised by the European Commission with the support of the European Parliament?

Mental Health Europe very much welcomed the initiative to organize this thematic conference on the prevention of depression and suicide.

We call on the EU leaders to take real leadership:

- To take responsibility for the protection of the mental health and well-being of the population
- To ensure the effective implementation of the European Pact for Mental Health and Well-being
- To develop a more egalitarian and inclusive social model in which the non-profit sector is an essential actor
- To encourage national governments to put the fight against poverty and exclusion high on their political agenda
- To improve the social protection systems in the different Member States; this is especially important in Hungary and the Baltic States where the economic and social situation is at its worst
- To promote exchange of good practice between the different Member States
- To promote and foster cross-sectoral co-operation between policy makers in the different related areas – social policies – public health policies – human rights policies
- And last but not least: involve people with a mental health history and their carers in the design of policies, their development and implementation.

The cost of not taking action on depression is indeed too great. Doing nothing is not an option!

Nace Kovac
President of Mental Health Europe
Budapest, 11 December 2009