



Republic of Namibia

Remarks

by

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Minister of Health and Social Services**

**Speech for the Commemoration of the World Mental
Health Day**

**University of Namibia, 27 October 2008
Keetmanshoop**

Program Director

Hon. Ms K.M Hanse, Governor of Kavango Region

Hon. Regional Councillors

His worship the Mayor of Keetmanshoop – Cde. S.P. Tiboth

WHO Representative

Distinguished Guest

The PMO of Keetmanshoop Hospital

All Protocol Observed

Ladies and Gentleman

I am very pleased to have this opportunity to address you on World Mental Health Day, which we are commemorating today.

It is time to reflect and look toward the future of mental health. The World Federation for Mental Health theme for this year is: Making Mental Health A Global Priority: Scaling up Services through Advocacy and Action. The World Federation sees this message as crucial to the future of our global mental health movement

Ladies and gentlemen

Mental health and mental illness is part of every country, culture, age group and socio economic status.

WHO research shows that one in four people during their lifetime will experience a mental health problem and between 10-20 % of children have one or more mental or behavioral problems.

It is estimated that four of the ten leading cause of disability and premature deaths world wide are psychiatric conditions for ages 14-45 years.

Ladies and gentlemen

These are worrying figures. There are many factors in our environment today that may be contributing to these trends including the difficult socio economic conditions we find our selves in, increasing levels of alcohol and drugs abuse and exposure to violence and trauma.

The World Health Organization defines health as a” state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” and there can be no health without mental health. This definition demonstrates the complex relationship of the body (physical) the mind (mental, emotional/psychological) and social (interpersonal relationships, work, family etc) aspect of life.

Ladies and gentlemen

Mental disorders cause great suffering. Despite the fact that many mental disorders can be treated, most persons who are sick do not even receive basic mental health care. So why haven’t mental illnesses, mental health services and the promotion of mental well being received the attention and funding that other disorders and health issues have over the years?

Although the majority of persons with mental disorders live in low and middle income countries, the vast majority of global mental health care resources are located in high income

countries and the human rights of people with mental disorders have been routinely compromised and denied.

Ladies and gentlemen

Over four decades since the WHO first identified mental health as a global health priority, and six years since the last mayor report on prioritizing mental health issues, the vast majority of people with mental disorders still do not receive evidence based care. Worse enough, a number of people with mental problems and disorders continue to experience appalling abuses of human rights, often under the guise of mental hospital care. Families of most people with mental disorders are the only providers of care, support and shelter. Without this care, the situation for people with mental disorders would be even desperate than it is already is, yet, there is virtually no acknowledgement of this role, nor any practical support for families. Hence, informed, targeted and constant advocacy with clear and coordinated messages is increasingly needed to make mental health and mental illnesses a priority and to afford those living with mental illness the service and respect they deserved.

Ladies and gentlemen

People who have better understanding of mental illness are less likely to support and practice stigma and discrimination. In this regard we need to scale up public awareness and education about mental disorders. We should not only do this during the month of October which has been selected as mental health month, but also integrate these messages in all other campaigns. We also need to make the public aware that mental illness can be treated. Effective

treatments are available. Seek help from your nearest health professional.

Ladies and gentlemen

It became clear that there is a need to put global mental health back in the spotlight of global health. The policies regarding this area for instance the national policy on disability and the national policy for mental health are in place and we need to scale up the implementation.

We have to ensure that mental health care users are not excluded from accessing social grants, employment, education and other services on grounds that they have a mental illness. In fact they should be the ones given priority in accessing basic services in line with relevant policies and legislation due to their vulnerable status. The best way to create change is through concerted action and advocacy in each community of Namibia and the rest of the world. Each of us have the power to change, the ability to help, and the dedication to see a different world for mental health care, treatment and promotion.

Ladies and gentlemen

I would like to appeal to the private sector as well as other government departments to provide employment opportunities to the stable mental health care users in line with their skills and qualifications and to create a work environment that support and contribute to wellbeing of all employees including those with a mental disorder.

Ladies and gentlemen

Let me also appeal to the families of mental health care users and the community at large to support and respect mental health care users and provide them with an environment that is conducive for them to regain their self esteem and self worth.

My relative who is mentally ill is still my relative, so is my mother, father, sister, brother, my uncle, my child, my neighbor etc. They deserve to be treated with the respect and dignity as fathers, mothers, sisters, and uncle irrespective of their mental health status.

Finally, I would like to extend my appreciation to health professionals who interact and care for people with mental problems and illnesses.

I thank you