

# “NO HEALTH WITHOUT MENTAL HEALTH”

## Celebrations of Mental Health Week October 10-17, 2008 in Trinidad and Tobago

Recognizing the importance of mental health, the Minister of Health in Trinidad and Tobago, Jerry Narace designated October 10-17 as Mental Health Week in Trinidad and Tobago and several events took place.



Minister of Health, Jerry Narace

With the phrase, “No health without mental health”, public health discourse now includes mental health, in its positive sense, as well as mental illness. Just as public health and the population health approach are established in other areas such as heart health and tobacco control, so it is becoming clearer that, “Mental health is everybody’s business”.

**World Mental Health Day** with its theme “Making Mental Health a Global Priority – Scaling up Services through Citizen Advocacy and Action” was celebrated worldwide on 10 October 2008. Articles appeared in Trinidad and Tobago newspapers in an effort to increase the public’s understanding of mental illnesses, encourage the reduction of stigma and discrimination against people living with a mental illness, and promote positive emotional wellness and good mental health strategies.

From October 14-16, 2008, the Ministry of Health in collaboration with the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization held the **National Forum on Mental Health Promotion and Mental Disease Prevention**. Promoting mental health means enhancing the mental health of all in the community, of those with no experience of mental illness as well as those who live with or have a history of living with or one or more illnesses. Promoting mental health uses a range of actions that increase the chances of more people enjoying better mental health.

Those invited to participate in the Forum demonstrated the recognition by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago that inter-sectoral collaboration is key to effective programs for mental health promotion. For some collaborative programs mental health outcomes are the primary objective. For the majority, however, these may be secondary to other social and economic outcomes but are valuable in their own right.

Approximately 60 attended the national forum with representation from: the Ministry of Health and Regional Health Authorities; the Tobago House of Assembly; the Ministry of Education; the Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development; the Ministry of Social Development; the Ministry of the Attorney General; the University of the West Indies; the Chamber of Industry and Commerce; the National Parent Teachers Association and the private sector. Appreciation is extended to all those attending for their commitment to improving mental health services in the country. As well, the attendance of **Dr Shekhar Saxena**, Coordinator, Mental Health Evidence, Research and Action on Mental and Brain Disorders (MER) in the World Health Organization; Dr. Jorge J. Rodriguez, PAHO/WHO Mental Health Coordinator, and Ms. Devora Kestel, PAHO/WHO Mental Health Sub-regional Advisor for the English-speaking Caribbean were key to process.



In the Forum's opening ceremony, Dr. Carol Boyd Scobie, PAHO/WHO Representative in Trinidad and Tobago emphasized that **mental health is a fundamental human right** enabling people to experience life as meaningful and to be creative, active and productive. Improved mental health is linked to better health, productivity and safety and is key to development in every country. She went on to say that WHO is now calling on governments, donors and mental health stakeholders to rapidly **increase funding and basic mental health services to close the huge treatment gap** for a number of mental, neurological and substance use disorders.



Left to Right: Dr. Rohit Doon, Advisor Health Promotion, Communications and Public Health in the Ministry of Health of Trinidad and Tobago; Dr. Carol Boyd Scobie, PAHO/WHO Trinidad and Tobago Representative; Senator Jerry Narace, Minister of Health of Trinidad and Tobago; Ms. Sandra Jones, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Health of Trinidad and Tobago

The Minister of Health in Trinidad and Tobago, Jerry Narace stated that addressing mental health is a major priority of the government, as it aims to ensure social inclusion where “everyone will be provided with an opportunity to make a contribution to national development”. He furthermore announced that the **2008 Mental Health Bill** has been finalized and will shortly be presented to the Legislative Review Committee. The Bill addresses address several key issues including the de-institutionalization of psychiatric care and the establishment of service delivery models that integrate mental health into the primary health care at the community level. This re-orientation demonstrates that Trinidad and Tobago sees mental health as a vital component of primary health care as advocated by Dr Margaret Chan, Director-General of the World Health Organization, when announcing the *Mental health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP)* on October 9, 2008.



Dr. Rodriguez

Dr. Jorge Rodriguez, PAHO/WHO Mental Health Coordinator spoke about challenges and responses in **mental health in Latin America and the Caribbean** including but not limited to the following: insufficient mental health services and resources in health systems; low mental health budgets with the major proportion spent on the psychiatric hospitals; primary health care teams are not prepared to handle mental health problems; obsolete or almost nonexistent mental health legislation in many countries; limited mental health programs and services for children and adolescents; poor or non-existent mental health research; and lack of priority to mental health protection of the vulnerable populations.

Dr. Wendel Abel from the Department of Community Health and Psychiatry at the Mona Campus of the University of the West Indies provided a **regional perspective on mental health services in the Caribbean** and spoke to similar challenges previously enunciated by Dr. Rodriguez but specific to the Caribbean context.





Dr. Ramtahal

Dr. Shekhar Saxena, WHO Programme Manager in the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse made a presentation on how to assess mental health systems through the application of the **WHO Assessment Instrument for Mental Health Systems (WHO-AMIS)**. Trinidad and Tobago is currently implementing this important tool and Dr Indar Ramtahal, Chair of the National Mental Health Committee, made a presentation on the preliminary results from its implementation. The final report of the assessment is to be completed by the end of 2008.

In the National Forum, the Ministry of Health of Trinidad and Tobago decided to focus on **two important settings for mental health promotion and mental disease prevention – schools and workplaces**.

Inter-sectoral linkages between schools, public health and other community services are a key component of effective mental health promotion. Mental health promotion is integral to the educational work of schools and involves all school professionals. Promoting mental health involves all aspects of the development of children and young people and is for all children. Promoting the positive mental health of all pupils and involving changes to school climate can be effective and are likely to be more successful than brief class-based mental illness prevention programs. Specific interventions can increase social and emotional competence and positive behaviors, to reduce risk and increase resilience. Early identification and effective treatment of mental illness is critical to preventing mental disorders. Mental health promotion involves not only the school day but also out-of-school-time.

Professor Gerald Hutchinson from the Faculty of Medical Sciences at the St. Augustine Campus of the University of the West Indies provided an employer perspective on mental health promotion in Trinidad and Tobago. Investing in healthy working practices and policies is cost-effective for business and the wider society. Mentally healthy workers are more productive.



Professor Hutchinson

Work is conducive or dangerous to mental health depending on the psychosocial working conditions, the match with worker abilities and aspirations, and a culture of worker participation in decisions about organizational structure and processes. Organization-wide or systems approaches to job stress are more effective than other alternatives, with benefits both to individuals (for example, better health) and to organizations (for example, lower absenteeism). Work health and safety laws and regulations need to refer to mental health.

On the evening of October 15, 2008 the Ministry of Health held its 5<sup>th</sup> Health Sector Quality Awards Ceremony. This is the first year that mental health was included as a specific award category. **Congratulations to Dr. Stafford Pierre and his staff of the Arima Rehabilitation Centre**. Not only did the Centre win the award under the Mental Health Category but several other categories as well. This Centre is a residential facility focusing on psycho-social rehabilitation under the St. Ann's Psychiatric Hospital. Special recognition was also given to the work of Dr. Pierre on an individual basis as he received the award for Quality Individual of the Year (Clinical).



Left to Right: Dr. Jorge Rodriguez, PAHO/WHO Coordinator of Mental Health; Dr. Stafford Pierre, Arima Rehabilitation Centre in Trinidad and Tobago; Dr. S. Saxena, WHO Programme Manager in the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse; Ms. D. Kestel, PAHO/WHO Mental Health Subregional Advisor for the English-speaking Caribbean

At the request of Ms. Agatha Carrington, Chief Executive Officer of the North West Regional Health Authority, Dr. Saxena spoke to health workers in the Authority.



This was a very interactive session. Appreciation is extended to all those attending for their commitment to improving mental health services in the country.

Dr. Saxena being thanked by a staff member of the North West Regional Health Authority