

## PREVENTION IS A KEY ELEMENT OF PUBLIC MENTAL HEALTH

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Public health is "the science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through the organized efforts and informed choices of society, organizations, public and private, communities and individuals" (Winslow 1920). This was one of the first integral definition of public health in modern era. Later on, a definition of health was agreed as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity", by the United Nations' World Health Organization (Preamble to the Constitution of the WHO 1946).

The Public Health Institutes are the organizations focused on the interventions to prevent and manage diseases, injuries and other health conditions through surveillance of cases and the promotion of healthy behaviours, communities and environments (Culig 2014). The core functions are:

- The assessment and monitoring of the health of communities and populations at risk to identify health problems and priorities;
- The formulation of public policies designed to solve identified local and national health problems and priorities;
- To assure that all populations have access to appropriate and cost-effective care;
- Health promotion and disease prevention services, and evaluation of the effectiveness of that care.

### Public health organizations in Croatia

Dr Andrija Stampar, founded a very first School of Public Health in Zagreb in 1927. In the following years a whole network of public health organizations was erected across the country. Today, the network consists of 21 Public Health Institutes placed in every capitol of administrative region and one on the national level in Zagreb. The largest one is the Andrija Stampar Teaching Institute of Public Health in Zagreb. There are a five referral centers appointed by Ministry of Health. The Institute was founded as a Hygiene Institute with preventive and intervention programs focused on the urban environment.

In 1961 Public Health Institute became a central public health organization in the city of Zagreb, with modern public health services as epidemiology, environmental health, health statistics, health public policy, occupational and sport medicine. In 1994 school medicine service was joined, and after a while in 2001

also mental health, cancer screening programs, aero allergy, pharmacoepidemiology and gerontology center. When Hygiene Institute in Zagreb was founded by the City Council in 1952. monitoring of the Centre for psychohygiene was among the other functions (Službeni glasnik Grada Zagreba 1952). Unfortunately, it disappeared later as a public health program, until 2002. when the Outpatient Department for Addicted was established. Due to respectable work with addicted patients, it was decided to establish the Mental Health Department. Various preventive programs are running: for tobacco users, substance abuse, gamblers and vulnerable minority groups, mobbing and cyberbullying among young population affect their well-being and mental health.

In public mental health, the main area of preventive work is outside the health care settings: in schools and workplaces. Bulling among youth is significant public health problem. A strategy to prevent bullying should include a whole school not only the critical classroom. A multidisciplinary approach is more effective (Wahlbeck 2015). There is a need to develop initiatives that engage young people and encourage them to seek for help. Public Health Institutes with interdisciplinary approach (school medicine and mental health) might be ideal environment to establish such service.

Mental health is integral to overall health and wellbeing and should be treated with the same urgency in as physical health (Chapman 2005). Mental illness can influence the onset, progression, and outcome of other illnesses and often correlates with health risk behaviors such as substance abuse, tobacco use, and physical inactivity. Depression has emerged as a risk factor for such chronic illnesses as hypertension, cardiovascular disease and, diabetes, and can adversely affect the course and management of these conditions. In many ways prevention is at the beating heart of public health, and an embrace of a population-based approach to the prevention of mental illness gives us both the remit and the charge to focus our efforts. Prevention efforts have greatly reduced the prevalence of many communicable and non-communicable diseases worldwide. By contrast, prevention strategies for mental disorders remain in their infancy. This approach can bring core foundational public health principles to reduce overall incidence of mental disorders. This aims to stand as a corrective to the oversight of mental health by many of us in the public health community.

## **A focus on prevention can catalyze a public health approach to mental health**

What should be done to reach the efficacy level of other public health programs that are already successful like lower prevalence of cardiovascular diseases, increased the life expectancy, high prevalence of vaccinated children or low prevalence of communicable diseases.

There is a need for devoted and skilled multi-disciplinary teams, also the organizations with a fine record in public health programs activity and a political support. The public mental health should be among higher priorities of a health authorities.

Also, a placed of scientific guidance is must! The programs should be evaluated, indicators measured and willingness to change management supported.

The important tool of evaluation is a scientific journal available to public health professionals, not only medical doctors, to read, to learn, to improve critical skills. The best way to have a fair evaluation of your work is exposing it to scientific community who will support you or give you a valuable comment.

The decision of editorial board of *Psychiatria Danubina*, an international journal with significant factor, to devote regularly one issue every year to public and global mental health promotion (Jakovljevic 2016) will for sure change a perception and support the multi-disciplinary concept of public mental health in Croatia and neighbor region. Management of Andrija Stampar Teaching Institute of Public Health with dr Zvonimir

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