

Chapter 22

Global Burden of Mental Disorders: Quality of Care and Unmet Needs for Treatment of Chronic Mental Illness

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ABSTRACT

Mental disorders are an important cause of long-term disability and dependency. It accounts for over 15% of the disease burden in developed countries, which is more than the disease burden caused by all cancers. Mental illness is a leading cause of suffering, economic loss and social problems. The burden of mental disorders is likely to have been underestimated because of inadequate appreciation of the connectedness between mental illness and other health conditions. Mental disorders increase risk for communicable and non-communicable diseases, and contribute to unintentional and intentional injury, and comorbidity complicates help-seeking, diagnosis, and treatment, and influences prognosis. Consequently, health professionals have trivialized the issue of mental illness. It is essential that researchers and public health professionals work together to resolve the enormous public health crisis presented by mental disorders. In short, we must “mainstream” mental health.

INTRODUCTION

The WHO proposition that there can be “no health without mental health” has also been endorsed by the Pan American Health Organization, the EU Council of Ministers, the World Federation of Mental Health, and the UK Royal College of Psychiatrists. Mental disorders are an important cause of long-term disability and dependency. Mental health is more than the mere lack of mental disorders. The positive dimension of mental health is stressed in WHO’s definition of health as contained in its constitution:

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“Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” Concepts of mental health include subjective well-being, perceived self-efficacy, autonomy, competence, intergenerational dependence and recognition of the ability to realize one’s intellectual and emotional potential. It has also been defined as a state of well-being whereby individuals recognize their abilities, are able to cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and fruitfully, and make a contribution to their communities. Mental health is about enhancing competencies of individuals and communities and enabling them to achieve their self-determined goals. Mental health should be a concern for all of us, rather than only for those who suffer from a mental disorder (World Health Organization [WHO], 2003).

DEFINING CHRONIC MENTAL ILLNESS

1. Who Is Chronically Ill?

Individuals who, through no fault of their own or their families, suffer from one of several diseases affecting the brain, the most complex of human organs. The causes remain unknown, but are probably multiple. There is no cure, but we do have effective treatment. In addition to having a brain disease, people with chronic mental illness (serious mental illness) are (by definition) significantly functionally impaired by the illness for an indefinite period of time (diagnosis, disability, duration). At least 1% of the population are chronic mentally ill. The problems of victims and their families are compounded by stigma, one of the cruellest and most prevalent forms of bigotry that exists.

- **Symptoms of Chronic Mental Illness:** Acute, “positive” symptoms (at least one of these usually present, at least during an exacerbation of illness):
 - Distorted perceptions; loss of contact with reality;
 - Delusions.
 - Hallucinations.
 - Disordered, disorganized and confused thinking.
 - Unstable and inappropriate emotions.
 - Bizarre behavior; impaired judgment.
- Residual (“negative”) or deficit symptoms (several of these usually present most of the time):
 - Vulnerability to certain kinds of stress.
 - Extreme dependency (sometimes combined with hostility).
 - Difficulty with interpersonal relationships.
 - Deficient coping skills.
 - Poor transfer of learning; fear of new situations.
 - Restricted emotional response and lack of enjoyment.
 - Reduced speech and impaired abstract thinking.
 - Reduced ability to pay attention; slowness.
 - Apathy; lack of motivation; phobic avoidance of situations.
 - Sensitivity to over- (and under-) stimulation (Goldman, 1998).

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