

SETTING UP THE MASTERS PROGRAMME IN PUBLIC MENTAL HEALTH IN THE INSTITUTIONS OF EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION

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BACKGROUND

The Eastern Mediterranean Region of the World Health Organisation comprise of countries extending from Morocco in the West and Pakistan in the East. The region is unique as regards its peoples, geography, and above all diversity in terms of population densities, health infrastructure, resources (both human and economic), and disease patterns. A common thread is however the absence of a robust mental health policy and effective mental health services in nearly all the member states of EMRO. The member states also lack indigenous specialists trained in public mental health policy and services. They consequently rely either on foreign resources in this regard or end up blindly following western models that fail to find local relevance, and fail to deliver, consistently. Other peculiarities that demand local / homegrown solutions to address the mental health issues are an ever increasing gap in resource allocation for mental health services, and the magnitude of mental health problems. (Reference... figures, data...). The additional challenges faced by the countries of the region include: stigma of mental illness, changing population patterns, growing awareness for use of scientific mental health care, mental health services that are in dire need of newer ideas, reorganization and improvement, lack of modern specialized units for psychiatric intensive care, high security / dependence forensic services, crisis management, day care, short and long term inpatient care, mental health – friendly policies sensitive to human rights of mentally ill, and well utilized, coordinated and robust community mental health programmes of international standing and standards. These gaps in the mental health scene in EMRO often reflects in highly fragmented, poorly coordinated, and many a times unsafe delivery of mental health care, civil and human rights abuses of mentally ill, and minimal resource allocations for mental health amongst member states.

EMRO WHO INITIATIVE

In a bid to address the issues raised above, a regional consultation on setting up a master's programme in mental health policy and services was organised by WHO / EMRO on 5 – 6 November 2012 in collaboration with the NOVA University, Lisbon, Portugal. Dur-

ing the consultation the rationale for a master's programme and the available options for setting up such a programme in regional institutions were thoroughly discussed. Each interested institution from EMRO region was asked to make a presentation on its capacity to run a two year masters programme in mental policy and services that best addressed the needs of the region.

The discussion and presentations were followed up by a participatory review of the capacities of the regional institutions based on a set of a stringent preset criteria (Table A) covering the categories of human, financial, logistic and experiential resource that each institution harboured. The participants also developed a work – plan to define the concrete actions to be undertaken by each involved party i.e. the regional institutions, WHO / EMRO, and the Nova University, to address the lack of trained human resource in the field of public mental health and service delivery. A similar list (Table B) was drawn to identify the support that NUL will provide to an institution that fulfills the criteria listed in table A. The initial consultations led to a consensus on the following points:

1. Public mental health is generally not an area adequately covered in traditional academic curricula.
2. Dedicated and concerted efforts would be required by the regional institutions to start a Masters programme.
3. Nova University Lisbon's (NUL) curricular model is relevant and useful to emulate, at least initially, with inclusion of region specific needs, while the regional institutions enhance their own capacity. NUL could therefore provide the technical expertise and faculty support to regional institutions running a master's programme in public mental health policy and services.
4. The key competencies to be imparted through such a programme would include the following:
 - To assist Governments in the formulation, development and implementation of mental health policies, plans and legislations aimed at reducing the existing mental health gaps, rational treatment of mental illnesses and their timely prevention, and protection and promotion of mental health leading to healthy

life styles.

- To evaluate mental health policies, plans, programmes and legislations.
- To organize and evaluate mental health care and related services.
- To conceive, formulate and implement mental health service research.
- To promote the human rights of people with mental health disorders and to ensure effective advocacy to amend or repeal policies that are likely to negatively impinge upon the civil rights, access to care or quality of life for individuals and families affected by mental illness.

At the conclusion of the consultation in Cairo, the Regional Director of EMRO later wrote to the heads of institutions who participated in the above mentioned consultation. The University of Health Sciences, Lahore, Pakistan and Sultan Qaboos University, Oman officially expressed their interest in setting up the Masters programme on the lines of the NUL programme. In light of the discussions conducted internally, with the interested regional institutions and the NOVA University Lisbon, sequential consultations during the calendar year 2013 – 2014 were organized with the goal of initiating the masters in public mental health in at least one of the regional institutions in 2014 – 2015.

Region's Response:

The following actions followed:

1. Senior decision makers and faculty members from University of Health Sciences, Lahore, Pakistan and Sultan Qaboos University, Oman visited NOVA University, Lisbon, Portugal and interacted with the Rector of NUL, and the Masters organisers from 15th to 17th October, 2013. The meeting was coordinated by the Regional Advisor, Mental Health and Substance Abuse, EMRO with an aim to:
 - Agree on the milestones and timelines for initiation of master's programme in the regional institutions by start of academic calendar 2014 / 2015 as found feasible.
 - Finalize the modalities of support from NOVA University, Lisbon and WHO / EMRO to be provided to Oman and Pakistan.
 - Discuss the human resources and financial outlays involved and possible avenues of funding the programme.
 - Discuss the feasibility and modalities of awarding a joint degree by UHS Pakistan, SQU, Oman and NOVA University, Portugal.
 - Review the curriculum, teaching and training methodologies including the working of the e-platforms.
 - Finalize the agreement of cooperation between the parties and sign a Memorandum of Under-

standing (MoU).

- Finalize an executive plan for launching the Masters programme in Pakistan and Oman.
- Finalize the curriculum in line with the needs and capacities of regional intuitions.
- Assist with development and running of e-platforms.
- Help with developing funding proposals for identified potential donors.

OUTCOMES

During the 03 days all of the above aims were visited and discussed threadbare. An MOU between the University of Health Sciences, Lahore, Pakistan and NOVA University Lisbon for a joint master for mental health policy and services was initiated. A clear time-line was drawn so as to put in place a joint masters programme by Spring 2015. The two institutions also agreed to jointly apply to appropriate agencies to fund the programme, while UHS agreed to provide the initial seed money. The programme will be open for local and international participants alike and shall focus on drawing participants from resource constrained countries such as Sudan, Djibouti, Somalia, and Afghanistan.

NUL and SQU decided to collaborate in a manner in which NOVA University provides the technical support to SQU in the form of modules for the programme, hosting the master's students from SQU for one 15 days residential session with the exiting masters programme at Lisbon and provide faculty support for teaching specified modules at SQU residential sessions. It was agreed that the organization and day to day management of the programme as well as award of the degree will be the sole responsibility of SQU.

Since the meeting in Lisbon, University of Health Sciences has started the initial work towards running the Masters programme. A series of reports by WHO on the subject and curricula currently in operation at various universities are being gleaned to identify the learning outcomes. A series of consultations have been organized locally including discussion on the subject with the Federal Minister of Health, Government of Pakistan, and Secretary Health at the Province of Punjab, and Director of the National Health Academy. This is to launch the programme with the endorsement and political will of stakeholders in health policy and services in Pakistan. A sensitizing and needs assessment programme has been launched through postgraduate trainers in psychiatry (two of them are co-authors in this report). This initiative will help in enriching and shaping the curriculum according to the local and regional realities as regards public mental health policy and service development. These trainees will also develop a research agenda for the course participants that will also reflect the research priorities of EMRO in general and resource constrained countries in specific.

Table A: Set of criteria for assessment of the profile of hosting regional institutions:

1. Profile of the University / Medical school and the mental health department to host a Master in Mental Health Policy and Services (MasMHPS).

The regional University / medical institutions willing to run the MasMHPS should meet some criteria in order to be able to run the programme on a sustainable basis (see table below):

University / Medical School institutional profile:

Human resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated full time faculty in the areas of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Public health. ✓ Mental health. • The faculty members should have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Experience / capability to manage online courses and supervise students' projects and thesis (giving online lectures, checking regularly emails and answering regularly students' queries). ✓ Specific time dedicated to the programme considering that the course is presented online for students in different countries with possibly different time zones. • Support staff: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Administrative staff. ✓ Assistants. ✓ IT experts.
Financial resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic and / or financial incentive to dedicated staff recruitment of additional staff (if needed). • For running at least 2 courses (4 years). • Supporting students for under – resourced countries.
Logistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Library (physical – virtual). • Residential facilities for visiting faculty. • IT services (including a reliable internet connection). • Available cheap accommodation for students attending the Master.
General requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established collaboration with other academic centres including research centres / institutions nationally and internationally. • Established internal / external evaluation / accreditation mechanisms. • Degree / diploma awarding capacity. • Access to and linkages with the public health system and services of the country.

Department hosting the programme:

Human resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Psychiatrist (s). ✓ Psychologist (s). ✓ other mental health/public health professionals specifically qualified and experienced in the areas of mental health of the populations, epidemiology of mental disorders, mental health policy, service development and legislation general qualifications: ✓ Capability and experience to manage online courses and supervise students' projects and thesis (giving online lectures, checking regularly emails and answering regularly students' queries). ✓ Availability for the programme considering that the course is presented online for students in different countries with different time zones.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support staff dedicated for the programme: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Administrative staff. ✓ Programme assistants. ✓ IT experts.
Financial resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic and / or financial incentive to dedicated staff.
Logistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Library (physical – virtual). • IT services (including a reliable internet connection).
General qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience in providing and managing courses on related areas including mental health policy and legislation, human rights and service development. • Established collaboration with other academic centres including research centres nationally and internationally. • Connections and collaboration with mental health policy and legislative bodies, civil society organizations and user associations. • Past experiences in running online courses. • Experience in epidemiological studies and mental health services research. • Established internal / external evaluation / accreditation mechanisms. • Access to and linkages with the public mental health system and services of the country.

2. Profile of participants to the MasMHPS

The main goal of the Master is creating an international critical mass of knowledgeable professionals from the Eastern Mediterranean Region able:

- To effectively contribute to improving Mental Health Policy, plans, legislation and Services in their own countries as well as in international settings.
- To promote human rights and human rights driven legislation.
- To conceive, organize and manage innovative mental health services.
- To undertake Research, to guide the policies, plans and development of services.
- Monitor and evaluate the programmes and services.

The participants should be mental health professionals with a clear interest to public mental health. Participants should have already a job as mental health professionals preferably in the public mental health system of their own countries.

They should be holders of a bachelor degree or nationally recognised equivalent qualification in the field of Medicine, Psychology, Nursing and Social Service.

Table B: The level / type of support the regional institutions can expect from Nova University Lisbon.

A progressive transfer of know-how and activities

from NUL to the selected institutions can be envisaged across the time in order to achieve the maximum of decentralization of the Master towards the selected institutions.

Based on the above and provided an analysis of the financial implications, NUL will:

1. Invite a selected number of observers from the selected institution(s) attending the residential sessions of its Master programme currently in progress.
2. Make available the curriculum and the training modules of its Masters programme to the selected institution(s).
3. Assist the selected institution(s) in the adaptation of the curriculum to serve local and regional needs.
4. Train in Lisbon a limited number of trainers from the selected institution(s).
5. Visit the shortlisted institution(s) to discuss strengths and weaknesses of each of them in delivering the Masters.
6. Provide faculty for residential training in selected institutions taking the responsibility to deliver one or more modules (e.g.: Service Organization, Human Rights, and Global Mental Health).
7. Consider a joint award of masters in public mental health policy and services if mutually agreed upon by the participating institutions.
8. Jointly develop or assist the selected institution in seeking grants to fund the Masters course.