

Featured Article

www.mhfirstresponse.org



Enhancing Mental Health First Response: A Crucial Step for Public Health in the Philippines, USA, and Colombia



Psychological Consultation

Olympia, WA, November 25, 2023 - In recent years, the importance of mental health has been increasingly recognized as a critical aspect of public health. This recognition comes with an understanding that mental wellness is not just a personal issue but a societal one, affecting millions of people worldwide. A closer look at the mental health first response systems in the Philippines, the USA, and Colombia reveals the challenges and opportunities in providing accessible mental health care.

The Philippines: Addressing Stigma and Resource Scarcity

In the Philippines, mental health has historically been a stigmatized topic. This stigma, coupled with limited resources, has posed significant challenges in providing adequate access to mental health services. The Philippine Mental Health Act, enacted in 2017, was a milestone in addressing these

issues. However, implementation remains a challenge. Remote areas still struggle with inadequate access to mental health professionals, and public awareness campaigns are essential to change societal perceptions. Those who could self-pay for services for Psychiatric evaluation for medication still face a hurdle even if they have a prescription from a Psychiatrist. Numerous psychotropic medications are unavailable in the Philippines or are out of stock. Psychotherapy is improving as both Psychologists and Counselors can provide services, but the high cost of psychotherapy is still a significant hurdle for most Filipinos.

The USA: Inequality in Access

The mental health care system in the USA is complex and multifaceted (Hitchens, A.). One of the most significant challenges is ensuring equal access to all individuals, regardless of their socioeconomic status, national origin, and sexual orientation (Columbia Area Transit, 2023). Health insurance plays a critical role in accessing mental health services (CAP, 2020), often leaving the uninsured and underinsured with limited options. Recent policy shifts, such as the Affordable Care Act, have made strides in increasing coverage, but disparities remain. The country also faces a shortage of mental health professionals, particularly in rural areas. Most states primarily focus on funding community mental health and neglect the vast number of private group practices that can assist in meeting the community's demands. Private group practices do not need specialized funding, but allowing them to bill the state Medicaid system will ease the ongoing lack of access to mental health services.

Colombia: Overcoming Post-Conflict Challenges

Colombia's history of internal conflict has left a profound impact on the nation's mental health. The government has recognized this and has been working towards integrating mental health into the public health system. Community-based programs have shown promise, especially in reaching populations in rural and conflict-affected regions. However, there's still a long way to go in terms of resources and trained professionals. A recent study by Ramos-Salcedo, M. (2022) shows that the Mental Health First Response (MHFR) model is an applicable and flexible approach in Colombia with proper cultural and language adaptation.

The Global Challenge: Lack of Access and Silent Suffering

Across these countries, a common thread is the silent suffering of those who cannot access mental health services. The lack of access exacerbates individual suffering and has broader societal implications, including lost productivity and increased healthcare costs. The situation calls for a global perspective in addressing mental health, recognizing it as a public health issue rather than a personal failure.

Recommendations for a Way Forward

Improving mental health services and access requires a multifaceted approach. Governments should prioritize funding for mental health and integrate it into primary health care. Public awareness campaigns are crucial in destigmatizing mental health issues. MHFR is a training model that transcends to different countries, given its flexibility and the public health approach to providing intervention. Prevention and the ability to intervene when someone is at high risk is one of the critical

topics of MHFR. There is also a need for innovative solutions, such as telehealth and virtual care, especially in remote areas.



Telehealth

Conclusion

The mental health crisis is a public health issue that demands immediate and sustained attention. The experiences of the Philippines, the USA, and Colombia highlight the diverse challenges in providing mental health services. However, they also offer lessons in resilience and innovation. As we move forward, it is essential to continue advocating for mental health as a fundamental human right and an integral part of public health. The silence surrounding mental health issues must be broken, and accessible care should be a priority for all. Mental health is not only a personal issue but a public health issue affecting society as a whole. We must continue to advocate for accessible care and break the silence surrounding mental health issues.

References:

Hitchen, A. R. (2009). "A Systematic Utilization Review of a Community Mental Health Program for Latinos." Retrieved from <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/48843297.pdf>.

Columbia Area Transit. (2023). Retrieved from <https://www.ridecatbus.org/civil-rights/>

Novoa, C. (2020). Ensuring Healthy Births Through Prenatal Support - Center for American Progress. Retrieved from <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/ensuring-healthy-births-prenatal-support/>

OpenAI. (2023). *ChatGPT* [Large language model]. <https://chat.openai.com>

Ramos-Salcedo, M. (2022). *Mental Health First Response (MHFR) Program: Assessing the mental first response in the Colombian population in terms of prevention and intervention on substance use disorder. [Master's thesis]*. Purdue University Global, West Lafayette, IN.

About MHFR

Prevention and Intervention training, psychological consultation, and employee assistance program (EAP) provider.

ADDRESS

Headquarter: 436 McPhee Rd. SW Olympia, WA
98502 USA

Global Presence: Philippines ~ USA ~ Colombia

EMAIL

info@mhfirstresponse.org

WEBSITE

<https://www.mhfirstresponse.org>