

Title: Mental Health: A Global Focus 2018

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Word count 387

Global Mental Health (GMC) is an area of public health importance that gets no attention in medical school curricula in the UK. In January this year, medical students from Green Templeton College (University of Oxford, UK) organized a one day conference to interest and inspire medical students in the area, with leading international researchers and clinicians working in psychiatry in lower and middle income countries (LMIC).

The highlights from the presentations included future potential interventions and prevention initiatives in areas of perinatal mental health, suicide and post-disaster settings. For example, Alan Stein highlighted that in LMIC, the adverse effects (e.g. low-birth weight, prematurity and cognitive impairments) seen in the children born to mothers with perinatal depression are not inevitable, and that sustainable interventions need to focus on groups most at risk. Secondly, Keith Hawton showed that the majority of more than 800,000 suicide deaths per year globally occur in LMIC, and that prevention initiatives need to be tailored to local patterns, especially methods of suicide. For example, in Sri Lanka, as in several other South-East Asian countries, pesticides are commonly used for suicide and prevention initiatives include bans on more toxic pesticides together with safer storage. Nick Rose also discussed the important role of the psychiatrist in the aftermath of disasters, both in recognizing and treating those with serious mental illness, and in then helping local health workers to build up sustainable systems to provide ongoing care.

The smaller workshop-based sessions proved particularly successful, as they encouraged active participation of student and junior colleagues. The workshop-sessions also highlighted the use of technology education as a key theme of the day.

The use of visual methods, such as documentary films, was presented by Erminia Colucci, not just as an effective means of displaying and representing research but as a research method in itself ¹. Technology is increasingly being used in LMIC where there is a shortage of psychiatric resources, overcoming cost and geopolitical barriers. Hassan Al-Taiar, described The OxPal Medlink, a web-based, distance-learning partnership aiming to support training of psychiatrists in Palestine².

Other interesting topics also covered during the conference included, discussions around working and training in psychiatry in LMIC, the ethical considerations in research studies and the need to improve support structures for refugee children in the post-refugee environment. This student-led conference demonstrated that GMH is an emerging field of interest within medical education, and underlined the opening message from Shekhar Saxena (Director of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, WHO) that while opportunities are being taken to address the current challenges in GMH there are considerable needs for further progress

References

1. Colucci E. Breaking the chains: ethnographic film-making in mental health. *Lancet* 2016; **3**(6): 509-10.
2. Penfold RS, Mohammad AA, Adam MA, et al. Evaluation of the first year of the Oxpal Medlink: A web-based partnership designed to address specific challenges facing medical education in the occupied Palestinian territories. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 2014; **5**(2): 1-10.