



# MENTAL HEALTH COALITION OF SIERRA LEONE

An initiative coordinated by Enabling Access to Mental Health in Sierra Leone.  
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## COALITION NEWSLETTER

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**THE 3<sup>rd</sup> MENTAL HEALTH CONFERENCE OF THE MENTAL HEALTH COALITION OF SIERRA LEONE (MHC-SL) - Tuesday 18th March, 2014**

**British Council, Freetown, Sierra Leone**

**THEME: 'Creating Sustainable Mental Health Systems in Sierra Leone'**

The Conference commenced with silent individual prayers followed by a statement welcoming delegates present. The chairman of program Joshua Abioseh Duncan, who is doubling as the Country facilitator of the Mental Health Leadership and Advocacy Program in Sierra Leone (mhLAP) as well as the Project Coordinator of the City of Rest wing of the Enabling Access to Mental Health in Sierra Leone (EAMHSL-CoR) emphasized that the third Mental Health Conference of the Mental Health Coalition – Sierra Leone was surely a memorable event as the content and outcome would have a lasting effect in the lives of all attendees.

### STATEMENTS

Statements were made by noble dignitaries. Major among sensitive extracts brought out in their statements are the under mentioned:

#### **The Deputy Minister 1, MOHS, Dr. Abu Bakarr Fofanah**

The deputy minister thanked the organizers, regretting the unavoidable absence of the Minister of Health, Madam Miatta Kargbo. Dr. Fofanah applauded the Coalition and partners for their 'extraordinary commitment to a very important goal amidst the technical, financial and other demands.' He pointed out that a sound mental state is not only central to the personal wellbeing of the individual, but also a condition for socio-economic development. The timing is critical, due to the residual post-conflict trauma, plus the distress of the global economic meltdown. He stated that the government of His Excellency Dr. Ernest Bai Koroma, wants people living with mental health challenges and organizations supporting them to know that they are not alone. The Minister encouraged the MH Coalition to press forward with their ambitious and forward looking agenda.

#### **Mr. Walter Carew, Chairman Mental Health Coalition-Sierra Leone**

Mr Carew expressed the Coalition's pride to host the third successive conference. He said the 2014 theme of 'Creating sustainable mental health systems in Sierra Leone', is the most appropriate next step on how we can create Sustainable Mental Health Systems in our Country that would ensure access to good quality Mental Health service that will meet the need of all'. Such a system should be: Holistic, Culturally relevant and Sustainable. The Chairman underlined the need for government to take the driving seat and provide leadership and direction. He ended with a repeat of last Conference's appeal to the Government through the Ministry of Health and Sanitation that the review of the current legislation called the 'Lunacy act of 1902' be given HIGH PRIORITY as it is KEY in protecting the rights of the service users and providers, thus contributing positively to the sustainability of any Mental Health system set up in country.

#### **Chairman of the Commission for Persons with Disabilities**

The Chairman stated that "We are all potential candidates of mental ill-health". He spoke of adverse consequences if the nation's mental health is not addressed, including Autism and other areas. He lamented that there are no schools where there are psychologists dealing with mental health issues. He warned, things could go worse if not addressed at this stage before children grow up.

### Editorial

**E**bola, or rather the fear of sudden death by ebola, is the latest public mental health threat facing Sierra Leone in the wake of the MH Coalition's third Annual Conference in March. As if on cue, the main speaker Prof. Joop de Jong's presentation is titled: "**Public Mental Health as the royal road to sustainable mental health coverage**". The public panic even among health personnel is alarming. Fear cripples logical thinking, suspends reasoning ability or sanity, and often drives people to alcohol, drugs and other forms of substance abuse in a vain attempt to calm their fears. But fear is nothing but imagination run wild. It is False Evidence Appearing Real. So with Ebola adding to the stress of "the residual post-conflict trauma, and the distress of global economic meltdown", as highlighted by the Dep. Minister of Health, the timing is critical. This pestilence provides a unique opportunity for the Coalition to prove its *cultural relevance* to the Sierra Leonean society, by working alongside the besieged MOHS and partners to ensure public sanity is safeguarded, faith and public confidence in the health service is restored, and the viral scourge stopped dead in its tracks, before fear allows it to run wild and sow havoc. Join in this campaign by maintaining your peace of mind.

*Bowenson F. Phillips*



### Dep. Minister, Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, Mustapha Bai Attila

The minister emphasized that the theme is ambitious and that suitability is beyond just saying. Development activities should be designed taking into consideration mental health issues. He concluded with the following questions: Where are we now? Where do we intend going? What do we need to do to go where we intend? What measures have we put in place to go there? Research shows that mental health faces discrimination - therefore reordering of the social order is of uttermost importance, since mental health victims are also humans, robust efforts should be made to operationalize the theme.

### STATEMENT BY THE WHO REPRESENTATIVE - DR. JACOB MUFUNDA

The Statement of the WHO Representative was read by Aminata Kobie who tendered Dr. Mufunda's apologies for being unavoidably absent. He stated that people with mental and psychosocial disabilities are among the most marginalized groups in developing countries. Policies, laws and services in many countries reinforce human rights violations or fail to promote human rights. The burden of mental health is enormous. An estimated one in four people globally will experience a mental health condition in their lifetime. Mental health conditions are responsible for a great deal of mortality and disability, accounting for 8.8% and 16.6% of the total burden of disease due to health conditions in low and middle income countries, respectively. He informed all that WHO is committed to supporting the improvement in mental health.

### MHLAP – Joshua Duncan

“Transformation of mental health systems...requires unprecedented commitment from Government etc... Without systems, the functionality of society could not “

### AWARENESS RAISING DRAMA

The West Africa Medical Mission team made a drama presentation on the effect of discriminating and stigmatizing against the mentally ill and possible means of addressing these challenges.

### KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Prof. Joop de Jong, MD, PhD, University of Amsterdam, AISSR, Boston University School of Medicine

Prof. Joop de Jong's presentation is titled: “**Public Mental Health as the royal road to sustainable mental health coverage**”. He defined Public mental health as ‘the discipline, the practice and the systematic social actions that protect, promote and restore the mental health of a population’.

The three sustainability keys are: **protect, promote and restore**. For sustainability, we must learn to **think Public Health**. He highlighted the common tendency to ‘always want to **treat (restore individuals)**, rather than **prevent (protect Communities)**. Appreciating the **mhGAP Intervention Guide** launched by the WHO in 2010, he recommended that the Guide needed ‘cultural adaptation and long-term implementation.

In Jong's Conclusion the following Key-Points were highlighted:

The PMH model accommodates a variety of preventive and curative interventions.

Multi-sectoral, multi-modal and multi-level preventive principles can be applied in an integrative and eclectic way. Prevention can be molded to the requirements of the specific socio-cultural contexts



## ENABLING ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH IN SIERRA LEONE

The Enabling Access to Mental Health in Sierra Leone (EAMH-SL) programme is a partnership between the City of Rest Rehabilitation Centre, Community Association of Psychosocial Services, and the University of Makeni. International partners are the Global Initiative in Psychiatry and CBM.

EAMH-SL is a European Commission -sponsored project, design to meet mental health needs in Sierra Leone. It is a five year project that began in January 2011.

This newsletter serves to facilitate communication and information sharing among Coalition members; raise awareness on activities related to mental health in Sierra Leone; update and present progress on the National Mental Health program and on the Enabling Access to Mental Health Project; in addition to providing notification on upcoming events.





The model helps to clarify the complementary relationship between the UN and (Non) Governmental actors. It shows how the sectors of health, education, social affairs, human rights, gender and rural development can collaborate. The model may help to identify gaps in our knowledge and to guide the future elaboration of a preventive approach. The increasing complexity of health systems demands that we rethink the competencies of mental health professionals.

**Other Presentations:** Other Presentations and case studies at the conference were thus done:

**Theme 1: Sustainability** – Case Study (Hannah Boakerie) [www.commitandact.com](http://www.commitandact.com)

**Theme 2: Holistic – Conceptual Presentation** was done by Dr. Carmen Valle with Co Presenters on Holistic Case study by Concern World Wide.

**Yoga Exercise:** - T-man and Tamsin had delegates do some yoga exercise which added the desired flavor to the entire program.

**Theme 3: Culturally relevant** – was presented by Harvard University whilst the Case Studies was done by (WHI-FAAST)

The participants also benefitted from tea-break and lunch as well as break-in-group sessions.



### INTER-SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL ESSAY COMPETITION

#### **“SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH-A CHALLENGE TOWARDS ENHANCING A PRO- DUCTIVE FUTURE FOR STUDENTS”**

Winner: Gbatundu Ndeyia Kutubu

School: Sierra Leone Grammar School

Mental Health according to the World Health Organization is: *“A state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make contributions to his or her community”.*



Today, there are different kinds of mental health problems but the most common and dangerous occurs as a result of substance abuse which is also known as drug abuse.

Substance and drug abuse on the other hand is described as a specific use of a substance (drug) in which the user

consumes the substance in a given amount or other harmful methods which is hazardous to themselves or others. The excessive or addictive use of these drugs for non medical purposes usually defines a state; emotional and sometimes physical, characterized by a compulsion to take them on constant bases in order to experience their mental effect. The effect of drug abuse on an individual forms the bases for its cumulative effect on the society and this is the major danger of drug abuse.

A wide range of drugs are susceptible to be abused by youths, these drugs ranges from most common and less expensive such as cigarette to expensive and more deadly ones like cocaine and heroin. The abuse of these substance leads to criminal penalty in addition to possible physical social and psychological harm. There are many cases in which criminal or anti-social behavior occurs when the person is under the influence of a drug. Long term personality changes in individuals may occur as well. Substance or drug abuse is prevalent with an estimated one hundred and twenty Million users of hard drugs such as Cocaine, heroin and other synthetic drugs. Young Sierra Leoneans especially pupils and students develop certain habits, for the sake of acceptance in a group. Some of these dangerous habits such as smoking, alcohol drinking and drug taking are resorted to for the sake of helping them to cope with the problems, fears and pressures of everyday life. Some use this as a means of escape from the realities of life; realities which they do not want to face or tackle.

There are various kinds of drugs which are usually abused by young people (mainly Students) in Sierra Leone. They include Cigarettes, Alcohol, Marijuana and Cocaine.

Cigarettes for instance are drugs easily available to youths. They are quite addictive and can cause lasting effects on young people. They are consumed by smoking and could therefore be related to Marijuana which is also very widely consumed. Smoking of these drugs provides a source of pleasure and at the same time is a menace to health. Most adolescents and students in Sierra Leone smoke because it makes them feel like adults by imitating adult activities or even keeping them “awake”. The various activities connected to smoking provides a way to get over nervous tensions. A heavy smoker craves for tobacco and an addictive habit is often stronger than will and knowledge combined. No evil habit has to enslave the students of this nation as that of using tobacco and marijuana. I sometimes wonder about the universal acceptance and indulgence of tobacco when its effects are only harmful.

Alcohol is another substance which when abused destroys the mental health of students and poses a great challenge towards enhancing a productive future for all. Contrary to the general belief that alcohol is a stimulant, it is a drug which is habit-forming. It produces a harmful effect on the behavior of students. Due to social or peer pressure and public tolerance, alcoholism is widespread. The wide range of hazards on the brain hinders the effectiveness of learning for students and pupils seeking education. Alcohol impedes self control, impairs judgment and affects conscious actions. Drunkenness does not only lead to loss

of intelligence but can also lead to death, thereby terminating the very existence and possible future of youths, who happens to be one of the most vulnerable groups to alcoholism.

When young people indulge in alcohol consumption, they act as criminals, doing wicked deeds. Many youth fall into sin while under the influence of alcohol. Those who wish to have full control over their behavior wisely abstain from the use of all intoxicating beverages. Even Solomon, the wise king of old condemned alcoholism. There is also a high rate of suicide in alcoholic and other drug abusers. This is very common among adolescents, with one in four suicides in adolescents being related to alcohol abuse. For instance, approximately thirty percent (30%) of suicide cases in the United States of America are related to alcohol abuse.

Our social skills are significantly impaired by alcoholism due to the neurotoxic effects of alcohol on the brain. It has been suggested that social skills training adjunctive to inpatient treatment of alcohol dependence is probably efficacious. The initiation of drug and alcohol use from 2010 "Monitoring the future survey", a nationwide study on rates of substance use in the United States, shows that forty-eight percent (48%) of 12<sup>th</sup> graders report having used an illicit drug at some point in their lives. In the thirtieth day prior to the survey, 41% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders had consumed alcohol and 19.2% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders had smoked tobacco cigarette.

The World Health Organization estimated that around 140 Million people were alcohol dependants and another 400 Million suffered alcohol related problems. Do all think these statistics describe a better future for students today? Students and those in adolescent as a whole occupy a delicate and sensitive position within the political structure for several reasons. Research has proven that drug barons prefer recruiting their traffickers from the age of fifteen (15) to thirty-five (35) years, most of whom are either unskilled, unschooled or students and even the unemployed. So in reiterating the question, what is the fate of the young generation and what is the assurance of a brighter future for them when such menaces plague our society?

Generally, peer pressure, child abuse, emotional stress, weak parental control, imitation, truancy among young students, the easy accessibility and availability of drugs and the ineffectiveness of the laws on drug trafficking are the factors influencing the abuse of drugs among youths especially students.

It is becoming unhidden and undisputable that illicit drug use is rapidly becoming a part of students' lives and for a large number of students it starts in secondary schools. All this we must not forget, affects our mental wellbeing which shapes our personalities and future. Young people and adolescents also end up as drug addicts in their search for fun, joy and a diversion from the real challenges of life.

#### A piece of advice to all Students:

There should first of all be the strong determination and firm resolve to overcome this evil habit. Drug abuse should be discouraged by the older generation. This plague could be tackled by a proper family upbringing, parental care, guidance and love, parent-teacher co-ordination, awareness raising against the use of drugs through the use of mass media and sustained efforts of religious organizations.

Students should not allow themselves to be overwhelmed by the excessive demands made on them by older folks and society which is also another factor for resorting to the use of drugs.

They should be watchful against the rampant encroachment of western civilization with its attractions and the breakdown of the hold of traditional ways of life and societies which has made drug abuse a custom for most students.

The choice of friends is of utmost importance as "*birds of the same feather flock together*". By all means, if success is to crown the efforts in keeping students and pupils away from tobacco, the parents should set the right example.

In conclusion, the dangers of drug abuse should be reiterated to youths and students involved in it.

If substance abuse and mental health is curtailed, then, education could be achieved to the highest peak probably re-establishing Sierra Leone as the "Athens of West Africa". This will ensure the brightest and most productive future for students and the young generation.



**Our quarterly newsletter offers you the opportunity of making contributions to its periodic bulletin. You can send in identified challenges that need to be reviewed or changed, available opportunities that could be seized, and information for dissemination. You can take advantage of this opportunity by sending your contributions to the contact information below:**

City of Rest Rehabilitation Centre, 34 Fort Street, Freetown, Phone: +232 (0) 78 982 554, Email: [info@enablingaccesstomentalhealthsl.com](mailto:info@enablingaccesstomentalhealthsl.com)

Please enter comments, views, observations, and input at:

<http://enablingaccesstomentalhealthsl.com> / <http://mentalhealthcoalitionsi.com/>



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