



Rethinking the paradigm: Towards primary and public healthcare integration



With the meat of healthcare efforts over the past two centuries having been focused upon curative rather than preventative care, change is now in the air. At the beginning of the 21st century, we now find ourselves faced with the challenge and extraordinary opportunity to address a paradigm shift in medicine - but harnessing such potential can only emerge via a thorough understanding of how best to enhance access, quality and sustainability of health systems across economies.

Such is the pivotal message of Eliot Sorel, who will be speaking throughout the WPA 2015 Bucharest International Congress on the theme. Indeed, the congress was conceived with this opportunity and challenge in mind, bringing together a robust dialogue between primary care mental health and public health, as Professor Sorel explained: “This is a trifecta that is key to

taking advantage of this paradigm shift, to enhance health systems' performance, and to enhance individuals' and populations' health - particularly since, of the global burden of disease challenging our health systems in the 21st century, the lead cluster of disorders are non-communicable diseases.

"In 2013 alone, 8 million people died because of non-communicable diseases before their 60th birthdays. This is not a problem particular to high-, low-, or middle-income countries; it spans economies, so we all need to think about how we can do better. This paradigm shift and the opportunities it offers may be part of what we need to do in responding to this state of affairs.

We now know that non-communicable diseases are the result of a multifactorial phenomenon that includes genetic vulnerability, fitness, nutrition, and environmental factors. And while they may be recognized during the fifth and sixth decades, they tend to foment for some decades earlier in life. The WHO World Mental Health Survey speaks to this notion, stating that 50% of cases of mental disorder (of which depression is the lead disorder) exist in populations by age 14, with 75% manifesting by age 24.

"We are now beginning to see non-communicable diseases, including diabetes, cardiovascular disorders and depression, in younger populations below age 22," added Professor Sorel. "And one of the things that most healthcare systems currently lack is an emphasis on primary prevention. Most healthcare systems around the world are designed with a secondary and tertiary prevention mind. Many of them are hospital-based (which is the equivalent of tertiary prevention), and there are also countries that have out-patient clinics where secondary prevention takes place.

"It is incumbent upon us to start much earlier with primary prevention in which this trifecta of collaboration and integration between primary care mental health and public health is absolutely essential and would make a massive difference projecting forward in the years to come."

Amongst many prominent themes, the congress program explores the role of both age and gender in the expression of non-communicable diseases, with dedicated sessions to various life stages as well as several symposia dedicated to women's health.

A further shift in care is emerging, noted Professor Sorel, towards a more integrated and collaborative approach in contrast to the 19th to 20th century model of modular and insular specialty-based practice that did not necessarily consider the lifelong, multidimensional needs of the patient. "We have some of this beginning to emerge in the US, in what we refer to as medical homes and accountable care organizations," he said. "These are beginning to address that kind of approach in which primary care is beginning to make a modest in-road."

The WPA International Congress program reflects the necessity to look beyond care strategies, with tracks dedicated to comparisons of education, training, research, clinical experience and policy, with many experts attending from over 60 countries worldwide. “We are very fortunate to have spectacular leaders in health with us, such as Michael Kidd, the president of the World Organization of Family Doctors (WONCA); the president of the WPA, Dinesh Bhugra; in addition to that, Linda Lam will be coming from China; Paul Summergrad, the president of the American Psychiatric Association; David Ndetei from Kenya; Fernando Lolos from Chile; Ahmad Mohit from Iran; and Helen Herrman, the president-elect of the WPA. I beg forgiveness from all the others I have not mentioned!”

And, with future leadership in mind, a specially designed Young Health Professionals track will seek to address crucial issues in the future of training and practice, such as the integration of theory and practice, and the role of quality of life and cross-cultural factors in mental health. In addition to this, the key role of information computing technology (ICT) throughout the present and future of care forms a stout and integral part of the programing, explained Professor Sorel: “ICT is a key facilitator in accessing and organizing data that is essential both for analysis and innovation.

“Among those who are invited to our congress is an 11th grade high school student from the city of Constanta, who is an exemplary innovator at a very young age. Through a personal experience with a challenging illness, he came up with a very interesting innovation of a non-invasive diagnostic procedure. So ICT is useful both in diagnostic dimensions, as well as in integration of care dimensions, and in enhancing and evaluating a health care system’s performance.”

Professor Sorel speaks during a number of sessions during the congress proceedings. You can access the WPA 2015 Bucharest International Congress program at wpa2015bucharest.org/Program/Scientific-Program