
THE GRID NOTEBOOK #12

Groups for Rehabilitation and Inclusive Development

Building Communities of Practice for Rehabilitation and Inclusive Development in the North West Region of Cameroon

Newsletter #12 November 7, 2016

~~ Special Feature – Mental Health in Cameroon ~~

The GRID NOTEBOOK is a biweekly newsletter featuring Events, Announcements, News, Resources, and Opportunities you need to know about if you are interested in Rehabilitation and Inclusive Development in the North West Region of Cameroon.

To view this issue online, please go to <https://nwrcommunityofpractice.wordpress.com/articles-and-documents/>

We are happy to include submissions from people who share a passion for inclusive development in the North West Region. If you have something to contribute, please send it to nwrcommunityofpractice@gmail.com

This issue of the GRID Notebook is devoted to mental health to highlight recent important events in Cameroon. Mental Health has been behind in relation to other areas of health care in Cameroon. There have been few policies, no national treatment guides, and little in the way of training for personnel. The situation is rapidly changing, and in this issue we provide examples of these change initiatives. We can only include a bit of information in these pages – ask around to learn more!

If you feel you or a family member or friend are depressed or have any other mental health issue, please talk with someone you trust and try to get help. Help and support are available in the NWR.

News and Events

High Level Mental Health Policy Development Conference: A landmark, four day conference was held in Yaounde from the 24th to the 27th of October with invited mental health stakeholders from Government and Non-government officials as well as topic experts. This group deliberated and discussed for long hours - beginning each day at 8 a.m. and working until 7 p.m. or later each evening - to produce a Mental Health policy, a guideline, and a national program for mental health in Cameroon. The Minister of Public Health M. Andre Mama Fouda approved and signed the document on the 27th October, 2016.



As a result of this work, mental health services will become available as part of primary health care, more medications will be available, and other services and training will be developed, including more outreach programs, nursing education and programs to

prevent people from ending up on the streets. The roles of traditional healers were also included since they have a significant contribution to mental health and recovery.



GRID Members at Yaounde Mental Health meeting with other representatives

Several GRID members were part of the deliberations in Yaounde. The GRID Mental Health group (with members in several places in Cameroon and around the world) was very excited to get the breaking news on its *Whatsapp* group, seeing pictures and on the spot accounts at the end of the session. The Mental Health group will be monitoring the next steps closely to ensure that implementation takes places in the agreed on timelines. For example, one of the GRID Mental Health members, who participated in the event, wrote to the group: *“The discussions were full of different ideas and arguments from morning to night, but it all ended well and was approved. It was an exciting process to be part of.”*

World Mental Health Day, October 10th, 2016: The theme was “Dignity in Mental Health: Psychological and Mental First Aid to All.” This day was commemorated in several ways in the NWR, to sensitize the public on mental health. The theme for this year’s WMHD was dignity in mental health, psychological and mental first aid for all. In Cameroon and most low and middle income countries, despite the different crisis events, there are very few mental health workers/facilities, and most people needing mental health services do not get it at all. Understanding basic psychological and mental first aid helps to prevent many mental disorders that will arise as a result of crisis situations.



In light of this, the Family Care Center of the Banso Baptist Hospital, with the support of the mental health group of the GRID Network, provided training and talks in schools, churches, and mosques on how to identify mental disorders and provide psychological first aid that is humane, practical and supportive. Pens were shared to examination classes of schools, posters were pasted up, and brochures distributed for continuous sensitization on mental health. School health clubs were revisited on their club days and shown how to

identify mental health problems and provide basic first aid. For more information, contact Anya Nadege anyanadege86@gmail.com Mental Health Nurse at the Family Care Centre, Banso.

100% Jeune Live: A weekly radio show on Abakwa radio - FM 99.0 Tuesdays 4-5 pm, and Saturdays at 11 am. Popular episodes are available online at www.reglo.org. For November, the show's theme is *Alcohol and drugs - Harmful pleasures* and aspects of mental health, well-being, and addiction will be explored. Produced courtesy of ACMS www.acms-cm.org, the show's focus is on sexual and reproductive health education for youths. For information: Commy Mussa commyingabir@gmail.com

Resources

There are an increasing number of supports in the NWR for people who would like mental health support and psychological counselling. We include a few here – this is not a full list.

Psychological Counselling in Bamenda: One place for professional counselling is the Community Counselling Clinic (CCC) Nkwen. Located in a story building near Finance Junction. Contact Nghoh Mildred, Administrative Assistant, mildredleinyuy@yahoo.co.uk

Alcoholics Anonymous – There is an Alcoholics Anonymous group in Banzo. If anyone is interested in starting a group in any other place in the North West Region, information is available. For more information, contact the Head Chaplain, Life Abundant Program (LAP) Bamkikai, Pastor Shey.

BBH (Banso Baptist Hospital) Family Care Center provides counselling in Banzo. Contact: Anya Nadege anyanadege86@gmail.com

Emmaus Center in Bamenda – A residential treatment centre operated by Capuchin Friars in centre of Bamenda, located under the offices of the governor and close to the Government Bilingual High School Down Town. <http://ofmcapcameroon.org/index.php/projects1/emmaus-centre.html>

Babungo Integrated Mental Health Care for Humanity Mbenjeh-Babungo The BIMEHC site at Babessi subdivision, Ndop has several services and activities. Information from www.bimehc.org Email: info@bimehc.org or John Tumenta johntumenta@yahoo.com. Tel 237 679 834 047

Delegation of Social Affairs NWR – They have been supporting persons with disabilities, including people with persistent mental health issues and intellectual disabilities. More information from Mrs. Grace Ekie Tita g.ekie@yahoo.com

Bamenda Regional Hospital – The hospital has a neurologist who handles patients with epilepsy, and has sophisticated machines like EEG and CT scan for diagnosing epilepsy.

Psychological first aid –The WHO (World Health Organization) has developed a toolkit to help everyone learn about and provide support. You can read more here:

http://www.who.int/mental_health/world-mental-health-day/paper_wfmh_2016.pdf

Opportunities

Mental health and Health providers: It is important to remember that all health providers are at risk for experiencing mental health issues, stress, and trauma. Especially in an area like the North West Region, where there are many very difficult situations and very few resources and professional supports, health providers have to cope with situations in which they can feel overwhelmed, powerless, and traumatized. This can be seen as a normal reaction in such difficult situations. **If you feel that you are not coping well or would like some support to deal with your own personal**

mental health issues, please talk with your manager, your colleagues, or any member of the GRID Mental Health group for more information.

Let's Talk: In November 2016 the WHO launched a one-year campaign called *Depression: Let's Talk*. The goal of the campaign is that more people with depression, in all countries, seek and get help. You can get more resources, handouts, and get involved here:

The handouts available from the *Let's Talk* page provide general information on depression and how depression can be prevented and treated. They are intended for people who are living with depression themselves or who know someone who is. They include practical advice on what to do.

<http://www.who.int/campaigns/world-health-day/2017/handouts-depression/en/>

- Depression: what you should know
- Living with someone with depression?
- Worried that your child is depressed?
- Worried about the future? Preventing depression during your teens and twenties
- Wondering why your new baby is not making you happy?
- Staying positive and preventing depression as you get older
- Do you know someone who may be considering suicide?
- Do you feel like life is not worth living?

Want to know more?

There is a small but growing body of scholarly literature about mental health in Cameroon (some GRID members are authors). Here are some articles that have particular relevance to the NWR.

Atashili, J., Gaynes, B. N., Pence, B. W., Tayong, G., Kats, D., O'Donnell, J. K., ... Njamnshi, A. K. (2013). Prevalence, characteristics and correlates of a positive-dementia screen in patients on antiretroviral therapy in Bamenda, Cameroon: a cross-sectional study. *BMC Neurology*, 13.

<http://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2377-13-86>

Fofuleng Julius Babila (2015). The Challenges of Mental Health Disorder in Cameroon. Dissertation Submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the Master of Peace and Development Work. Available from: urn:nbn:se:lnu:diva-47338 . *Contact the author:* fofulengbabila@gmail.com or +46720158568

Gaynes, B. N., Pence, B. W., Atashili, J., O'Donnell, J., Kats, D., & Ndumbe, P. M. (2012). Prevalence and Predictors of Major Depression in HIV-Infected Patients on Antiretroviral Therapy in Bamenda, a Semi-Urban Center in Cameroon. *PLoS One*, 7(7), e41699.

<http://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0041699>

Kanmogne, G., Kuate, C., Cysique, L., Fonsah, J., Eta, S., Doh, R., ... Njamnshi, A. (2010). HIV-associated neurocognitive disorders in sub-Saharan Africa: a pilot study in Cameroon. *BMC Neurology*, 10(1), 60.

<http://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2377-10-60>

Keugoung, B., Kongnyu, E. T., Meli, J., & Criel, B. (2013). Profile of suicide in rural Cameroon: are health systems doing enough? *Tropical Medicine & International Health : TM & IH*, 18(8), 985–992.

<http://doi.org/10.1111/tmi.12140>

L'akoa, R. M., Noubiap, J. J. N., Fang, Y., Ntone, F. E., & Kuaban, C. (2013). Prevalence and correlates of depressive symptoms in HIV-positive patients: a cross-sectional study among newly diagnosed patients in Yaoundé, Cameroon. *BMC Psychiatry*, 13(228), 228. <http://doi.org/10.1186/1471-244X-13-228>

- Njazing, B. N., Edin, K. E., Sebastián, M. S., & Hurtig, A.-K. (2011). Voices from the frontline: counsellors' perspectives on TB/HIV collaborative activities in the Northwest Region, Cameroon. *BMC Health Services Research*, 11, 328. <http://doi.org/10.1186/1472-6963-11-328>
- Pemunta, N. V. (2013). The Social Epidemiology and Burden of Malaria in Bali Nyonga, Northwest Cameroon. *Health, Culture and Society*, 4(1), 20–n/a. <http://doi.org/10.5195/hcs.2013.69>
- Pence, B. W., Gaynes, B. N., Atashili, J., O'Donnell, J. K., Kats, D., Whetten, K., ... Ndumbe, P. (2014). Feasibility, safety, acceptability, and preliminary efficacy of measurement-based care depression treatment for HIV patients in Bamenda, Cameroon. *AIDS and Behavior*, 18(6), 1142–1151. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s10461-014-0727-x>
- Pence, B. W., Gaynes, B. N., Atashili, J., O'Donnell, J. K., Tayong, G., Kats, D., ... Ndumbe, P. M. (2012). Validity of an interviewer-administered patient health questionnaire-9 to screen for depression in HIV-infected patients in Cameroon. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 143(1-3), 208–213. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2012.05.056>
- Suffling K, Cockburn L, and Edwards K. (2014). Tools for the journey from North to South: A collaborative process to develop reflexive global mental health practice. *Disability and the Global South*. Available from: <https://dgsjournal.org/volume-1-no-2/>
- Wonkam, A., Mba, C. Z., Mbanya, D., Ngogang, J., Ramesar, R., & Angwafo, F. F. 3rd. (2014). Psychosocial burden of sickle cell disease on parents with an affected child in Cameroon. *Journal of Genetic Counseling*, 23(2), 192–201. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s10897-013-9630-2>

In Closing:

Everyone has a role to play in improving the mental health in our communities. There is much that is being done, and much still to be done.

We close with some remarks made by observers at the close of last GRID Mental Health group meeting. These reflections are a reminder that all of us, in whatever walk of life, are part of the efforts to have compassion and improve services for those who are suffering:

“I am struck by the optimism in those pioneering this venture. GRID is taking giant strides despite the challenges ahead... The taboo and stigma surrounding mental patients is on the way out in Cameroon.”

“I was very much impressed with the group because we can actually sit and deliberate on issues of mental health and how to cater for those with mental issues. It is very encouraging. We live at a time where many people still attribute mental issues to witchcraft and so they see no need of caring for people with mental disorders. Instead of seeing how they can remedy the situation they tend to stigmatize the individuals. GRID members are actively changing those stigmatizing attitudes.”

This edition of the GRID Notebook was prepared by Lynn Cockburn, Anya Nadege, Dr. Godlove Ndongdeh, and Commy Mussa. Thanks for reading! Please share it with others.