Highlights from the 8th Transcultural Mental Health Conference

This year, the 8th Transcultural Mental Health Conference, funded by the Mental Health and Drug & Alcohol Programs, NSW Department of Health, was embedded into the annual Mental Health Services (TheMHS) Conference, which was held at the Sydney Exhibition and Convention Centre, Darling Harbour from 14 to 17 September 2010. This new partnership demonstrates the shared commitment towards the development and delivery of culturally inclusive and responsive mental health services for all Australians.

The 8th Transcultural Mental Health Conference was a resounding success, and included two keynotes, one featured symposia, 45 papers, two film festivals, and the launch by Governor Marie Bashir of the National Cultural Competency Tool for Mental Health Services developed by Multicultural Mental Health Australia. The Conference showcased new and creative responses in providing quality mental health care for diverse communities.

Keynote speaker Professor Derrick Silove set the scene with his presentation on meeting the challenges of transcultural psychiatry. Professor Silove highlighted the achievements made within the field, however, he believes there is more work to be done on winning over the minds and the practice of managers and clinicians on the front line.

Professor Silove threw down the challenge that there is an urgent need for national commitment to transform transcultural psychiatry and establish consensus on the components of the transcultural toolbox. He highlighted the work of the multicultural MH-OAT tools as a means for conducting transcultural best practice in clinical settings.

Keynote Professor Peppe Dell’Acqua is the Director of the Department of Mental Health, Trieste, Italy. In his keynote address he posed the question what does psychiatry actually do? This exact question was put forward by Italian psychiatrist, Franco Basaglia in the 1960’s, who proposed the dismantling of institutionalised psychiatric hospitals when he witnessed the questionable care being provided.

Prof Dell’Acqua was the mental health consultant to the recently released film ‘In the city of the mad’ (C’era una volta della città dei matti). He introduced the film during the conference film festival, an exciting new feature of the TheMHS conference.

Prof Dell’Acqua noted that the film speaks a common language to people who have experienced mental health institutionalisation across cultures. Central to his work and discussions is not losing sight of the individual, their uniqueness and what contributions they can make to society.

Another praised speaker at the conference was Dr Edward Nahim who is the only psychiatrist in Sierra Leone. He reminded us of the broader global issues that continue to impact on Australia and its people. Dr Nahim presented haunting images of the barbaric war in Sierra Leone to demonstrate the significant negative consequences it has had on the mental health of the nation. This provided a platform of understanding for what mental health workers in Australia should be aware of when working with survivors of torture and trauma.

At the symposium, NSW Health, through the Mental Health and Drug & Alcohol Programs (MHDAP) and the Multicultural
Mental Health Plan Implementation Committee showcased the NSW Multicultural Mental Health Plan 2008-2012. The plan builds on previous strategies, however stresses the need for the creation of data systems that meet the needs of a culturally diverse society.

This symposium also demonstrated the essential partnerships and achievements to date between policy, service providers, specialist transcultural services, non-government organisations, and communities and how these are the essential ingredients to generating real change.

The two key partnership projects highlighted at the conference were the Transcultural Rural and Remote Outreach Project (TRROP) and Multicultural MH-OAT.

The TRROP five-year report was launched at the conference and highlighted the positive outcomes for rural and remote communities. Professor Brian Kelly explained how TRROP can be extended as we move forward with the new health reforms. The Multicultural MH-OAT is another great example of key partners (InforMH, TMHC and MHDAP) working together to develop tools to assist front line clinicians.

Overall there was a high standard of papers and posters presented at the conference on a range of topics including system and organisational development, general practitioners, refugees, consumers carers, suicide prevention, comorbidity, mental health promotion prevention and early intervention, international papers and workforce development, education and training.

For more information about TheMHS visit www.themhs.org.au

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TMHC staff at the TMHC information booth
Thank you to Conference Organisers and Contributors

This year, the 8th Transcultural Mental Health Conference was held during the annual TheMHS Conference at the Sydney Exhibition and Convention Centre from 14 to 17 September 2010. The conference was a huge success and the Transcultural Mental Health Centre would like to thank:

- Mental Health and Drug & Alcohol Programs, NSW Department of Health, who provided funding for the 8th Transcultural Mental Health Conference
- The TheMHS Management and local Organising Committee for their partnership and leadership
- All the presenters and delegates

A special thanks to the 8th Transcultural Mental Health Conference Committee for their hard work and commitment in developing a thought provoking program – Scott Burcham, NSW Health; Eda Devoti, representing the NSW Health Multicultural Mental Health Plan Implementation Committee; Nadia Garan, TMHC; Helen Madigan, Co-As-It; Prof Abd Malak, SWAHS and Diversity Health Institute; Lachlan Murdoch, STARTTS; Christine Senediak, NSW Institute of Psychiatry; Phil Sandford TheMHS Coordinator; and Lily Wu, SSWAHS.

Thank you!

Maria Cassaniti
Convenor
8th Transcultural Mental Health Conference

TMHC launches TRROP report and receives TheMHS award

The Transcultural Rural and Remote Outreach Project (TRROP): Building Partnerships across the Great Divide report was launched at the 8th Transcultural Mental Health Conference on 15 September 2010.

TRROP is an equity and access initiative, which has explored models of service delivery for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in rural areas. It is the first activity of this kind in rural NSW and has yielded important information to guide future policy, planning, and service development.

The TRROP report highlights the work achieved in its initial five year implementation phase with key elements of the Project, community and service provider consultations, post consultation activities, project evaluation, observations, lessons learned, conclusions and provides TRROP-related recommendations.

TRROP is a joint partnership between the TMHC, the Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health (CRRMH), and the four rural area health services - Greater Southern (GSAHS), Greater Western (GWAHS), Hunter New England (HNEAHS), and North Coast (NCAHS).

TRROP’s innovation and excellence in mental health service delivery was recognised by receiving the silver achievement award at the recent Mental Health Services Conference (TheMHS) 2010.

The project won the achievement award in the Rural and/or Remote Services or Programs category, given in recognition of an innovative equity and access initiative for CALD communities in rural areas.

Senator Claire Moore, Senator for Queensland, and Chair of the Senate Community Affairs Committee presented the award to the Transcultural Mental Health Centre’s (TMHC) Manager Maria Cassaniti and TRROP Coordinator Michele Sapucci.

“It can be difficult for diverse communities in rural areas to access mental health services, therefore TRROP was developed to respond to this need by improving access to these services and increasing equity for new and emerging, disadvantaged and marginalised communities,” Ms Cassaniti said.
Keynote: Professor Peppe Dell’Acqua

Professor Peppe Dell’Acqua is a psychiatrist and Director of the Department of Mental Health, Trieste, Italy, and author of several books. His keynote address focused on the mental health reforms in Italy over the past three decades and what Australia can learn from these reforms.

In Professor Dell’Acqua’s keynote address he posed the question what does psychiatry actually do? This exact question was first posed by Italian psychiatrist, Franco Basaglia, who proposed the dismantling of institutionalised psychiatric hospitals when he witnessed the questionable care being provided in them. This question is still relevant today. “How does something that is a science, produce such violence and sense of loss in the community?” he asked.

The Trieste mental health model has provided powerful evidence of the positive outcomes that can be achieved by re-focusing the way of working in the mental health field. It has moved from a hospital-based model to a community-based recovery model so the individual is able to contribute as an active member of society.

"With the ever-increasing costs of care, institutions should focus on the community model that empowers the individuals to take the driving seat in their own care.” Professor Dell’Acqua also highlighted that “we must create change rather than reinforce the institutional worker.”

The film was based on a book Professor Dell’Acqua wrote on his experience of working with Franco Basaglia for over ten years. The film was developed by different agencies to celebrate the 30th year of the death of Franco Basaglia and the positive and revolutionary influence he had on the mental health system in Italy.

“The idea was to share Basaglia’s story of what he did in the Trieste and Gorizia areas in the two psychiatric hospitals there. I worked with the script writers and directors to ensure the film was appropriate and that it didn’t use any jargon as I wanted to ensure it appealed to a broad audience,” Professor Dell’Acqua said.

“The film is a cultural revolution about the psychiatric services in Italy and the way in which they were implemented and conducted. The film is about change – change described by different people including psychiatric nurses, patients, professionals etc.”

"The main challenge of being the mental health consultant for the film was that I was a direct witness to the story and part of the story so it was difficult to detach myself from it and look at it objectively,” he said.

For more information about the work achieved in Trieste visit: www.triestesalutementale.it/english/index.
Keynote: Professor Derrick Silove

Keynote speaker Professor Derrick Silove set the scene for the conference with his presentation on meeting the challenges of transcultural psychiatry. Professor Silove highlighted the achievements made in the field over the past 20 years and explained how transcultural psychiatry has taken giant steps in Australia with the consolidation and growth of services for immigrants and refugees.

Professor Silove stated that transcultural psychiatry offers the practitioner a framework for locating the person and his or her mental health recovery within a broad matrix of cultural and social factors, thereby extending the biopsychosocial to the bio-psycho-cultural model as exemplified by the ADAPT framework.

He emphasized that transcultural psychiatry continues to face major challenges in winning over the minds and the practice of clinicians at the grassroots level. Some of the obstacles include 1) the influence of a universalistic neuro-biological model of psychiatry 2) the complexities of a growing ‘cosmopolitanism’ and associated ‘hybridisation’ 3) time-constraints and the burden of public mental health care on practitioners and 4) the socio-economic divide that continues to disadvantage members of culturally diverse minorities.

According to Professor Silove, the most critical challenge that the field faces is translating a complex vision into readily usable tools and procedures for the clinician. He asserts that the field needs to develop consensus on what instruments need to be included in the transcultural toolbox. He highlighted the work of the Multicultural Mental Health Outcomes and Assessment Tools (MH-OAT) as a means for conducting transcultural best practice in clinical settings.

"Before the MH-OAT tool, I believe we inadvertently intimidated staff by pointing out how complicated transcultural psychiatry is and all the things you need to take into account," Professor Silove said.

"In my own clinical practice and experience – and this is not a criticism of the workers – but they don’t present you with the most basic information. For example, they don’t provide information on if the client is an immigrant or refugee, whether they have suffered trauma or not, if their family came to Australia with them or was left behind or how good their English is etc,” he continued.

“The MH-OAT tool reminds clinicians of the basic areas they should inquire about with each patient. When they see it in that format, it doesn’t look complicated.”

Professor Silove is the Foundation Professor of Psychiatry and Director, Psychiatry Research and Teaching Unit and Centre for Population Mental Health Research, Liverpool Hospital and the University of New South Wales; Visiting Professor, Karolinska Institute, Stockholm, Sweden; Chairperson of the Scientific Committee on Disasters, World Federation for Mental Health. Professor Silove has a long-term involvement in developing policy, research and clinical services in relation to refugee and other conflict-affected populations in Australia and internationally.
Sierra Leone’s only psychiatrist

In a country that is 71,740 square kilometres and holds 5.5 million people, Sierra Leone has only one psychiatrist – Dr Edward Nahim.

There are many challenges with being the only psychiatrist in a country, especially a country that is entrenched with the harshness and cruelties of war. Dr Nahim has to work in poor conditions where mental health services are under-funded and there are limited medications available.

“Funding for mental health programs and hospitals is sometimes excluded from the Sierra Leone health budget. The government thinks it is a waste of money and I can’t even get drugs for my patients,” Dr Nahim stated.

Dr Nahim works in the only psychiatric hospital in Sierra Leone. “There is a great demand to get treatment but mental illness is very stigmatised in Sierra Leone. People fear being socially excluded and discriminated against.”

“There is demand for my services outside of the hospital as well, in various communities. I see a minimum of 30 patients a day.”

The harmful effects of the war in Sierra Leone has had a significant impact on the mental health of the Sierra Leonean people and these experiences stay with them when they seek refuge in Australia.

It is therefore important for Australia’s mental health workers to understand global issues and the traumas that refugees experience.

Dr Nahim said that perceptions of mental health in Australia are much more accepting. Australia has recognised mental illness as a health issue that needs attention at the government level and policies have been developed to implement appropriate services.

“The Transcultural Mental Health Conference is important because mental health is not only a medical disorder, it’s a social disorder as well. Mental illness needs to be discussed at all levels – political, social, economical – in order to make it socially inclusive.”
Concurrent Sessions - Outcomes of the 8th Transcultural Mental Health Conference

In addition to the keynote presentations and featured symposia, the 8th Transcultural Mental Health Conference provided a range of papers to assist practitioners and other health professionals to further understand the mental health needs of Australia’s culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.

The conference highlighted recent research, evaluation and evidence-based examples of best practice service delivery models of care. One example of an innovative model of care for refugees was the Hope of Expressive Arts and Learning (HEAL) Program at Queensland’s Milpera State High School.

The HEAL Program is a school-based mental health initiative that uses arts and music therapy to help refugee children address social, behavioural and emotional issues. The program is unique because it’s physically located in the school and works in partnership with therapists, teachers and the Principal.

The cross-functional communication with teachers allows for follow up with how the refugee students are progressing with their settlement into the school and Australia. Jane Griffin who is an Arts Psychotherapist at Milpera State High School said that in 2009 the HEAL Program helped over 200 children in group therapy and over 100 children individually.

The NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS) Executive Director Jorge Aroche facilitated a captivating presentation on the STARTTS’ integrated bio-psycho-social approach to assist refugee children and young people.

Mr Aroche explained a variety of STARTTS programs that contribute to the recovery of refugee children and young people who have suffered torture or trauma experiences. The paper provided information to people in the mental health sector on the recent developments in the understanding of refugee trauma and effective treatments to aid in recovery.

Recovery is an ongoing cycle of exploring, maintaining and establishing one’s self individually, with family and the wider community. Victorian Transcultural Psychiatry Unit’s Consumer Advocate Evan Bichara highlighted five ingredients for recovery – support, hope, education, personal responsibility and self-advocacy.

Multicultural Mental Health Australia (MMHA), encouraged consumer participation through presenting on its national CALD consumer reference group and CALD speaker’s bureau. Furthermore, the MMHA stigma reduction package was recognised as a model of best practice to reduce stigma along with the successful work of Sydney Eastern Sydney Illawarra Area Health Service for using theatre to reduce stigma.

The Divisions of General Practice (GP) presented a targeted workforce development training program titled Minding the Gap: training for mental health professionals to work with Vietnamese and Lebanese migrants living with chronic war stress associated comorbidities. This paper highlighted the need for meaningful partnerships to be at the heart of initiatives in order to achieve successful outcomes.

GP’s are often the first point of access for CALD communities who have concerns regarding mental health. The NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health provided a great example of GP engagement. The Centre’s GP resource has been rolled out across NSW with interest from other parts of Australia and internationally.

The conference also showcased work being completed internationally from some of Australia’s closest neighbours. These papers helped to build our knowledge base of new and emerging communities, and how this could be applied within the Australian context.

Papers on comorbidity were a key feature of the conference and highlighted the need for further research into the area to improve access and equity. These papers emphasised that further investigation is needed to enhance understanding of the impact of comorbidity and thus the changing needs of CALD consumers, their families and the wider community.
Horn of Africa Family Wellbeing Day

On the 30th October 2010, Auburn played host to the Horn of Africa Family Wellbeing Day – a day that celebrated cultural diversity and wellbeing in communities and families from the Horn of Africa.

The Hon. Barbara Perry MP, Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Mental Health) and Member for Auburn attended the event along with the Hon. John Murphy MP, Member for Reid (NSW).

The theme for the Horn of Africa Family Wellbeing Day was Building resilience: Good friends help us bounce back. According to the Transcultural Mental Health Centre’s Michele Sapucci this theme was chosen to acknowledge the supportive role that relationships play in building individual and community resilience.

Over 200 people enjoyed the day’s activities including hip hop dance workshops, drumming workshops, face painting, jumping castle, halal BBQ and a soccer game run by two celebrity soccer players – Craig Foster and David Zdrilic.

Craig Foster is a former Socceroo and SBS football commentator. He made 29 appearances as an Australian Socceroo (1996-2000), once as captain. Craig works as an Ambassador for The Big Issue, promoting the work of the Community Street Soccer Program nationally, recognising sport as a catalyst for transforming the lives of homeless and marginalised Australians.

David Zdrilic is currently the soccer coach of Sydney United. He has played professionally in five different countries – in all he played 30 times for Australia scoring a remarkable 20 goals.

Young and old took part in the day’s soccer activities and participants received tips from some of Australia’s best players. Craig and David instilled positive sporting messages into participants and stressed the importance of physical and mental health.

Information stalls were held to disseminate translated information on a range of health and wellbeing topics. Furthermore, bilingual workers were available to liaise with community members in their own language.

The day was jointly organised by the Horn of Africa Relief and Development Agency (HARDA), Transcultural Mental Health Centre (TMHC) and the NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS). A special thank you to Auburn Council for its support of the event.
Mental Health Month (MHM) is part of a national mental health promotion campaign held in October each year. MHM is an opportunity to increase awareness and to promote mental health and wellbeing for all people including culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.

In 2010, the Transcultural Mental Health Centre (TMHC) in partnership with the Mental Health Association of NSW developed a number of initiatives including the translation of two fact sheets into English and 10 community languages - Good Friends Help Us Bounce Back and Building Resilience. Over 80,000 multilingual multimedia resources were distributed to community organisations, community members and to all health and mental health services in rural, remote and metropolitan areas of NSW.

Below are the key highlights of the TMHC 2010 Mental Health Month activities:

- In partnership with Macarthur Diversity Service, TMHC organised an Arabic Wellbeing Day that attracted over 27 participants.
- TMHC coordinated information stalls during the following events: MHM launch in Parramatta; Chinese Mental Health Forum in Lakemba; Korean Festival in Chatswood; Coffs Harbour Health Campus; Coffs Harbour City Library; Coffs Harbour Centrelink Staff Expo; Liverpool Playgroups Playing Together event; SSWAHS Assyrian Men’s Group in Greenfield.
- In partnership with the Cambodian Australian Welfare Council of NSW and the Khmer Community of NSW Inc, TMHC coordinated a Khmer Mental Health Forum that attracted 27 participants.
- Over 70 participants attended a mental health awareness event that was collaboratively organised by TMHC, the Bankstown Council, SSWAHS and the Vietnamese Mental Health First Aid Team.
- TMHC distributed information to the 60 participants who attended the Tamworth Stress Less Walk.
- TMHC developed a rural radio campaign in Tagalog called, "Wellbeing in Filipino Families".
- TMHC coordinated a drumming workshop for CALD young people in Coffs Harbour, which attracted 12 participants.
- TMHC facilitated ‘Good friends help us bounce back – how to look after your mental health’ presentations to the Assyrian Seniors Group in Bonnyrigg (30 participants); the Illawarra Multicultural Health Services Croatian Seniors Group in Figtree (70 participants); the SSWAHS Seniors Group in Bairnsdale (12 participants); the Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra in Wollongong (75 participants); the Australian Catholic Croatian Welfare NSW, St Johns Park (60 participants); and the STARTTS Afghani Men’s Group, Auburn (30 participants).

Important dates

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Transcultural Mental Health Centre

Working in partnership with consumers, carers, the community, and mental health services, to improve the mental health of people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.

Disclaimer

Contributions to this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the NSW Transcultural Mental Health Centre

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