

GUIDELINES FOR THE PRIMARY PREVENTION OF MENTAL, NEUROLOGICAL AND PSYCHOSOCIAL DISORDERS

5. STAFF BURNOUT



DIVISION OF MENTAL HEALTH

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

GENEVA

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This document is part of a series of fascicles on the primary prevention of mental, neurological and psychosocial disorders, prepared in response to the Resolution WHA39.25, adopted by the 39th World Health Assembly, and resolutions AFR/RC38/R1, EM/RC35/R.8, EUR/RC38/R6, SEA/RC41/R5 and WPRO/RC39.R13, adopted by WHO Regional Committees.

It contains principles useful for the primary prevention of staff burnout syndrome. Other fascicles in this series address specific disorders.

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Dr J. M. Bertolote
Editor

FOREWORD

In 1986 the 39th World Health Assembly adopted a Resolution on the Prevention of Mental, Neurological and Psychosocial Disorders. This Resolution referred to a document in which WHO's Director-General listed a number of problem areas which could be significantly reduced with the implementation of well-defined, acceptable and affordable interventions¹.

After the adoption of that Resolution, WHO Regional Committees considered it and Member States were requested to review the situation in this respect². WHO was asked to produce specific and detailed guidelines for the prevention of mental, neurological and psychosocial disorders.

Those Resolutions and requests resulted in a series of fascicles on this topic. The present fascicle includes principles and practical guidelines for the prevention of staff burnout syndrome. With the help of literature and experts' advice we identified the most efficient interventions to this end. We tried to identify problems and interventions more specific to either developed or developing countries, or to both. Future issues in this series address other disorders.

We hope that the model presented here will be useful not only for guiding action for the prevention of the problem hereafter discussed, but also - and perhaps more important - for stimulating others to produce similar guidelines on other problem areas. In this way, in a concerted and collaborative fashion, the vast area of primary prevention could be gradually and progressively covered.

It is important to note that despite the fact that the title of this fascicle refers to staff, most of what is discussed here - except perhaps items relating specifically to employment - applies to many caregivers who have relatives affected by mental disorders. These disorders, often chronic in nature, pose a considerable burden both on those affected by them and on those who care for them, usually their family members. They should find some alleviation of this burden by following some of the actions described and discussed here.

All comments and suggestions on this series are welcome and should be addressed to:

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¹ World Health Organization. **Prevention of Mental, Neurological and Psychosocial Disorders**. (Doc. WHO/MNH/EVA/88.1). Geneva, WHO.

² AFR/RC38/R1, EM/RC35/R.8, EUR/RC/38, SEA/RC41/R5 and WPRO/RC39.R13.

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

This document is intended for a wide audience; the main target groups are policy makers, health workers and the general public. Each has specific needs and the degree of complexity of the information as well as the language used in each section of the document are therefore different; for this reason, the same information, adapted for these groups, has been printed on different coloured pages:

- White pages contain extensive, detailed technical information providing the scientific evidence about the facts and the measures proposed; they are intended for health professionals, the technical and scientific communities.
- Yellow pages contain less detailed information at a technical level; they are intended for primary health care workers or workers in other technical sectors, e.g. education.
- Green pages contain brief and to-the-point information; they are intended for those readers with little time available or little interest in scientific literature, e.g. the general public, policy makers, journalists, etc.

This document discusses the prevention of staff burnout syndrome. Previous documents in this series have described specific disorders or behaviours in detail (mental retardation, epilepsy and suicide) in addition to a document on general principles for primary prevention. In all of them prevention is proposed both in terms of specific interventions (e.g. salt iodization) and of the settings where those interventions can be developed (e.g. what can be done by the Ministry of Industry and Commerce).

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