

DRAFT

Mental Health/Behavioral Health Integration Position Statement developed by representatives from FMEC, APA, NASW, WFMH, AMSA, SBM

Background:

Primary care has been shown to be the most effective way to improve health and sustain health care improvement in the developing world (or organize clinical and community health care services).

Integrating the treatment of mental health and behavioral health services in primary care has been shown to improve emotional physical patient functioning and decrease disability. This is extremely important, given mental and behavioral health disorders account for over 33% of global disability. Effective primary treatment models and systems exist. Integration projects in Swaziland, Pakistan, and China have demonstrated decreased symptoms, psychosocial distress, disease chronicity, hospitalization, and improved identification compared to usual care. The World Health Organization recommends incorporating mental and behavioral services into primary care. They and others have developed effective education materials for practitioners and patients.

The capacity to treat mental health issues by psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers and counselors is limited in any country, but particularly in the developing world where mental health providers are few and mostly located in urban areas. The goal of integration is to extend mental health professionals' capacity by engaging primary care providers in mental health care. Stigma, discrimination and lack of knowledge about mental health disorders are some of the reasons that prevent persons with mental illnesses to seek care from the mental health sector.

The capacity to treat medical issues with a major behavioral component by specialists is limited. Treatment for HIV/AIDs, maternal health practices, or chronic disease may be handled by specialists who may not see patients until it is too late to make a difference in the disease process. Task-sharing between primary care and specialty systems is ideal for the prevention, early intervention, and management of these conditions. Primary care practitioners need training and systems that can address health behaviors such as smoking, sexual behaviors and diet that contribute to poor health.

We intend to use this position statement to influence our own organizations, funders, policy-makers, government and non-government organizations to develop strategies to support the integration of mental and behavioral health services into primary health care training and care.

Position Statement:

Mental and behavioral health are integral to primary health care. Taking this into consideration, the World Health Organization recommends integrating mental and behavioral health services into primary care and supporting evidence that demonstrates the importance of doing so. We are calling for international leadership to promote this approach. In particular, we urge governments, funders and professional organizations to:

- 1) Work within our organizations to promote the importance of integrating mental health and behavioral health services into primary health care throughout the world
- 2) Promote the adoption of a research agenda and clear, measurable outcomes in primary care development projects to assess the impact of mental and behavioral health care

- integration into primary care in the global context
- 3) Enlist persons and resources in support of primary care/mental health integration in health and development policies.

The following organizations have reviewed and are in full support of this statement:

Organization:

Date:

Version 6, 11/21/08