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23 Oct 2001 016 UTC

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DEVELOPMENT REPORT – October 22, 2001: WHO Report on Mental Illness

By Jill Moss



This is the VOA Special English Development Report.

The World Health Organization has published a new report on mental health. It says that one out of every four people in the world will suffer from a mental or brain disease at some time in their lives. W-H-O Director-General Gro Harlem Brundtland is calling on governments to make mental health a serious concern.

The World Health Organization estimates that about four-hundred-fifty-million people currently suffer from mental illness or brain disorders. About one quarter of these people suffer from depression. About fifty-million people have epilepsy, a nerve disorder. These conditions can be treated. However, the W-H-O reports that nearly two-thirds of people with a known mental disorder never seek help from a health professional.

Doctor Brundtland says mental illness affects people in both rich and poor countries. She says most people can fully recover if treated. However, only a small number of people receive even the most simple care. This is often because of limited resources and medicines. In addition, Doctor Brundtland says that health care providers in many countries often do not have the necessary skills to treat mental diseases. She adds that mentally sick patients are usually not treated with fairness in their cultures. And many nations do not have good public health policies.



Doctor Brundtland says that most people suffering from mental disorders can live productive lives if they get the right treatment. For example, more than eighty percent of people with the severe mental disorder schizophrenia can be free from the disease returning after one year of treatment. Up to sixty percent of people with depression can recover with the right mixture of medicines and treatment.

Experts say mental health problems can be treated at a small cost. The W-H-O says governments should treat patients in community health centers instead of large mental hospitals. Officials also believe that care for the mentally ill should not be seen as a separate kind of health care. Instead, the W-H-O believes that countries should include mental health care as part of their general health care systems.

This VOA Special English Development Report was written by Jill Moss.

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