

Call for more unified approach to mental health care

Much more needs to be done in primary health settings to meet the growing need for mental health care.

AUT University Professor Max Abbott says mental health is becoming an international health priority, with the World Health Organisation determining that by 2020 depression will be second only to cardiovascular disease in contributing to the total global burden of disease.

He says about half of New Zealanders experience a mental disorder some time in their lives; one-in five of the population currently.

Professor Abbott says most people go untreated and this has major consequences in terms of quality of life, strained and broken relationships, lost workdays, physical health and medical costs.

While commending recent government initiatives to improve access to mental health care in primary health settings, Professor Abbott says much more needs to be done to effectively reach the hundreds of thousands of New Zealanders suffering from depression, anxiety disorders and alcohol and drug problems. This includes up-skilling doctors and nurses,



including mental health professionals in primary care teams, and improving linkages with specialist mental health services.

As part of Mental Health Week (October 5-11) AUT is hosting a half-day workshop and evening seminar – Mental Health in Primary Care: Enhancing Treatment and Promoting Mental Health. Associate Minister of Health, Dr Jonathan Coleman will discuss Ministry policy on mental health in primary care and Professor Bruce Arroll, a GP with the ProCare network, will discuss mental health initiatives in the primary sector. The focus for the half-day workshop is on strategies for shaping the future of mental health. Workshop speakers will cover the role

of DHBs in promoting primary mental health, recent mental health initiatives and those being planned by the Ministry of Health, and Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand chief executive Dr Judi Clements will discuss improving mental health and wellbeing. Five general strategies for wellbeing – connect, give, take notice, learn and be active – are being promoted by the Mental Health Foundation. Professor Abbott says recognising the interconnectedness between mental and physical illness is another crucial step in the long-term management of mental health.

Visit www.aut.ac.nz/mhw or more information on AUT's Mental Health Week events being held on October 8.

US expert says Montessori education leading the way

The largest gathering of Montessori parents and educators met last week at AUT's North Shore campus to listen to a visiting academic speak about the advantages of a Montessori education. Dr Steven J. Hughes is an American Paediatrician and Neuropsychologist at the University of Minnesota Medical School. He was recently in Auckland to give a talk titled 'good at doing things' which looks at why Montessori educated children are simply better at doing things. AUT University is the only university in New Zealand to offer a teaching qualification with a Montessori specialty for both early childhood education and primary as part of its Bachelor of Education. This specialty was developed in conjunction with the Montessori Association of New Zealand and is designed to equip early childhood educators with the skills, knowledge and attitudes they need to be effective teachers in a Montessori setting. Although not a Montessori educator himself, Dr Hughes is a proponent of the teaching methods which have been around for more than 100 years and were started by Maria Montessori in Rome. The sell-out lecture at Akoranga's new lecture theatre to 320 parents and teachers, mostly from Auckland but also from as far south as Wanaka, was a chance to hear why Dr Hughes believes that a Montessori learning environment provides an unequalled education experience. "Knowing what we now know, I can't imagine why anyone would want to do education any other way," says

Dr Hughes. In his talk Dr Hughes demonstrated how Montessori education works with what we now know about brain development and how it fosters the development of advanced cognitive functions, social cognition, as well as competencies such as empathy and leadership.

"Montessori is a brain-based, developmental educational method that allows children to make creative choices in discovering the people, places, and knowledge of the world. It emphasises hands-on learning, self expression and collaborative play," Dr Hughes believes. "There is simply nothing else that approaches the extraordinary cognitive developmental potential of a good, Montessori learning environment."



While mental health has long been the poor relation in health progress has been made in increasing treatment provision for people suffering from the most severe forms of mental disorder. Nevertheless stigma persists and much remains to be done. Until recently less attention has been given to much more common disorders including mild to moderate depression, clinically significant anxiety and substance misuse. These often go undetected and untreated in primary health care services that focus more on physical health. In reality, mental and physical health are intertwined, with one affecting the other. Comprehensive care requires equal attention to mind, body and wider social and environmental contexts. There are some moves afoot, consistent with Government's health policy Better, Sooner, More Convenient, to redress this imbalance. Pilot projects have involved extending GP consultations for mental health, adding mental health co-ordinators to primary care teams, training and supporting staff and increasing access to psychological therapies. This year World Mental Health Day (10 October) focuses on enhancing mental health treatment and promotion in primary health settings. World Mental Health Day has special significance for me as I was President of the World Federation for Mental Health when the Federation first established the Day in 1992. It is now celebrated annually throughout the world and has played a significant role in increasing the priority governments give to mental health and supporting the work of mental health non-governmental organisations. In this country, the focus of the Day has been extended to a national Mental Health Week with activities led by the Mental Health Foundation and supported by the Ministry of Health. The University endorses this initiative.

Max Abbott, Pro Vice-Chancellor, North Shore



Celebrate Mental Health Week at AUT

We invite you to a free workshop and presentation on Mental Health in Primary Care

When: Thursday 8 October, 2009 Where: AUT Conference Centre, City Campus
 Time: Workshop (1pm - 5pm) How: Online - www.aut.ac.nz/mhw
 Presentation (5pm - 7.30pm) Email - carole.popman@aut.ac.nz (RSVPs are essential)



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