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EPA Communication on the occasion of the World Mental Health Day

JOINING FORCES TO TACKLE AN UNPRECEDENTED CHALLENGE!

World Mental Health Day, 10 October 2020 – Mental health remains among the leading causes of ill-health and disability, with about 450 million people suffering worldwide (WHO's World Health Report, 2001). This number is expected to increase as a result of the COVID-19 crisis and its containment measures: anxiety, depression, stress and many other mental health consequences of the pandemic will have to be addressed in the coming months.

Professor Philip Gorwood, President of the European Psychiatric Association (EPA), states: *“Mental health, which is a key component of health and well-being, has been challenged by the Coronavirus crisis. The pandemic created a large increase of the need for mental health and psychosocial support, all stakeholders should therefore work together to provide adequate resources for ensuring that everyone has access to quality care. People with pre-existing psychiatric conditions are indeed at increased risk of contracting the disease, feeling more anxious and depressed¹, developing a severe form of the disorder, and dying from COVID-19²”.*

Especially in such times of emergency, coping with mental disorders require a multi-level and holistic approach. *“Today, coordinated actions are needed to tackle the challenges impacting on the mental health of the population. All levels and actors need to be involved and empowered, from frontline workers to patients living with mental health disorders and their families, who often play the role of informal caregivers and who are faced with heavy emotional, physical and financial burdens”*, emphasises Prof. Gorwood.

On the occasion of the World Mental Health Day 2020, the EPA calls for the need to allocate greater investments to mental health for granting quality care to all. The EPA also highlights the importance of supporting all the professionals concerned as part of the overall public health response, so that to ensure that the population's health is the main priority and that everyone receives the best treatment possible. In particular, the role of psychiatrists is of crucial importance as, by establishing a good communication with patients and families, they improve the overall physical and mental outcomes.

At EU level, dedicated initiatives have been settled to promote exchanges and develop recommendations on mental health issues. However, despite the increased attention on the topic by governments, media and citizens, the provision of mental health care remains inadequate and the investment is still limited both at EU and country level³.

Since its establishment in 2012, the EPA Council of National Psychiatric Associations (NPAs) put many efforts to raise awareness and advocate on mental health across Europe. *“Our 44 NPAs from 40 European countries call on policy and decision makers at all levels, to invest more in research, high-quality care practices and equal access*

¹ van Reehnen et al. Journal of Affective Disorders 2020, 275: 69-77.

² Wang QQ, Xu R, Volkow N (*in press*) Increased risk of COVID-19 infection and mortality in people with mental disorders: analysis from electronic health records in the United States. *World psychiatry*.

³ At national level, evidence shows that that governments spend on average 3% of their health budgets on mental health, ranging from less than 1% in low-income countries to 5% in high-income countries (WHO, 2019).



to care. This is particularly urgent at the time of COVID-19 crisis” says Professor Simavi Vahip, Chair of the EPA Council of NPAs. Dr. Celso Arango, President of the Spanish Society of Psychiatry, underlines that “now more than ever, investment in mental health is essential, this will help bridge the major inequity gap caused by the pandemic”.

The importance of allocating resources to face mental disorders goes hand in hand with the support that should be given to health professionals who are tirelessly working to guarantee care in these challenging times. That is why the EPA initiated a collaboration with the European Federation of Public Service Union (EPSU), to make sure that frontline workers receive adequate mental health support: *“EPSU and EPA would like to pay tribute to those on the frontline of the pandemic, whose work in these challenging circumstances puts a great strain on their mental wellbeing. Frontline workers have been exposed to highly stressful and traumatic events, which can have substantial negative outcomes for their mental health, including stress-related illnesses as well as depression, anxiety, and insomnia. Even before the outbreak of the coronavirus, working in healthcare was stressful. But the pandemic worsened the structural weaknesses in health systems, and the lack of investment in healthcare workers.”*

Professor Philip Gorwood reaffirms the strong commitment of the EPA and its allies by stressing that *“the EPA, together with its partner organisations, is deeply committed to join forces, gathering mental health professionals, policy makers, patients and carers, to tackle this unprecedented challenge”.*



Notes for editors:

1. The **World Mental Health Day (WMHD)** is an initiative launched by the World Federation for Mental Health (WFMH) and is observed on 10 October every year, with the overall objective of raising awareness of mental health issues around the world and mobilizing efforts in support of mental health. The Day provides an opportunity for all stakeholders working on mental health issues to talk about their work, and what more needs to be done to make mental health care a reality for people worldwide. This year, the World Federation for Mental Health (WFMH) has decided to make “Mental Health for All: Greater Investment – Greater Access” the main theme of World Mental Health Day. More information on the [WMHF website](#).
2. The **European Psychiatric Association (EPA)**: with active individual members in as many as 88 countries and 44 National Psychiatric Association Members that represent more than 80,000 European psychiatrists, the EPA is the main association representing psychiatry in Europe. The EPA deals with psychiatry and its related disciplines and focuses on the improvement of care for the mentally ill as well as on the development of professional excellence.

Useful links:

EPA website www.europsy.net

EPA e-learning platform: <https://elearning.europsy.net/>

EPA COVID-19 Resource Centre: <https://www.europsy.net/covid-19-resource-centre/>

3. The **European Federation of Public Service Union (EPSU)** represents 8 million workers across Europe.
EPSU website: <https://www.epsu.org/>
4. **Useful sources:**
European Psychiatric Association policy paper on ethical aspects in communication with patients and their families. European Psychiatry, Carpiniello B, Wasserman D (2020).
Article available [here](#).

Developing Trust and Effective Care for people with depression: patients and psychiatrists working in partnership. EPA and GAMIAN-Europe (2020).
Report available [here](#).

Psychosocial support during the COVID-19 pandemic: interdisciplinary concept of care at a university hospital. Falkai P, et al. (2020).
Article available [here](#).
5. **For more information:** Mari Fresu mari.fresu@europsy.net