

Health system responses to mental health -related disability

Kristian Wahlbeck
Senior Technical Officer
WHO Regional Office for Europe
Mental Health Programme

Population mental health

- Increasing share of burden of illness in developed economies
- Costs of mental disorders are estimated to be 3-4 % of GDP, mainly due to loss of productivity¹
- Emerging mental health risks: economic downturn, transnationalism, diversification of life styles

¹ ILO, 2003



Trends in mental health systems

- Deinstitutionalisation
- Development of community care
- Closer integration with other health care
- Increased demand for services in the population
- Modest steps to empower service users
- Increased focus on promotion and prevention



Disproportionate funding of mental health services

- Mental disorders constitute more than a fourth of the burden of illness
- In many countries, one in three disability pensions is due to mental disorders

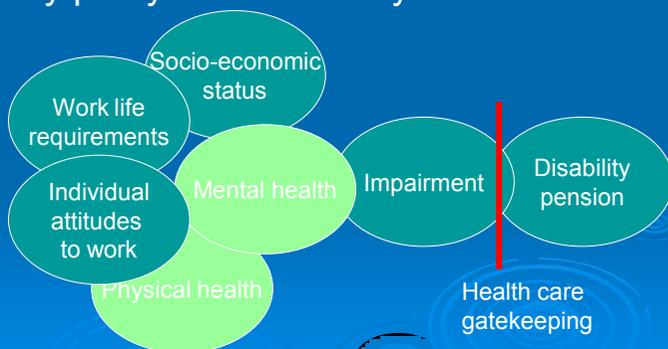
BUT....

- Mental health care share of total health care funding in European countries is 2-10 %.

WHO 2008

The role of health system

Disability pension is the endpoint of a complex process, only partly amendable by health systems



Why physicians contribute to increase in mental health -related disability

- In many countries, GPs and specialist physicians are gatekeepers, with conflicting commissions from patients and from social protection agencies
- Sick-listing practices have been shown to vary between individual physicians
- The patient's wish or demand for sick-listing has been suggested to influence the physician's decision to sick-list¹
- 39 % of Norwegian physicians admit having written polished medical certificates, most commonly to help the patient getting a disability pension²
- Awareness among health care staff on the benefits of inclusion in working life needs to be improved: is a disability pension or sick leave always in the interest of the patient?

1. Englund, ScandJPubH, 2000

2. Gulbarandsen, TidsskrNorLæge, 2004



The role of occupational health care

- Employee mental health contributes strongly to productivity
- Risk of common mental health problems in workers with high job strain or poor effort-reward balance may be as much as 80% higher¹
- Occupational health services are key players in preventing work-related stress
 - by promoting a healthy work place
 - by monitoring mental health of employees
 - by supporting adaption to changes in working life
 - By early recognition of mental health problems
- In the WHO European Region, half of the workforce remains uncovered²

¹European Survey on Working Conditions, 2007

²WHO



A case study: the MASTO Project

Finland: The national Masto project supports people in remaining in and returning to work by furthering :

- practices that increase wellbeing at work
- early support at work to deal with problems
 - self-treatment and support groups
- effective treatment and rehabilitation for depression
 - capacity building in occupational health care
- rehabilitation and return to work
 - legislative measures to enable stepwise return
 - Improved health care – employer liaison

The project is mainly implemented by the occupational health care services

Website: <http://www.tartumasennukseen.fi/en>



Good work
supports
mental health

Conclusions

- Health systems have a role in mental health promotion and disorder prevention in work life
- The gatekeeping function of health care professionals is challenging
- Early recognition and treatment of mental disorders reduce absenteeism
- The role of health systems can be supported by legislation to increase access to occupational health services
- Implementation of health sector interventions can be supported by incentives for work place health promotion and prevention
- Special outreach of health services to vulnerable groups at risk of being marginalised, such as unemployed people
- Improved liaison between health care and employers