

Importance of addressing issues in Youth Mental Health to achieving Universal Health Coverage

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MENTAL HEALTH

- IT IS WIDELY ACCEPTED NOW IN GLOBAL HEALTH AND PUBLIC HEALTH CIRCLES THAT 'THERE IS NO HEALTH WITHOUT MENTAL HEALTH'
- MENTAL HEALTH IS PART OF THE HEALTH DELIVERY PACKAGE AT THE PRIMARY CARE LEVEL
- THE EXPERIENCE OF LAGOS STATE HAS PROVED THAT BOTH IN TERMS OF TRAINING AND THE POTENTIAL FOR DELIVERING SERVICE, IT IS POSSIBLE TO RETAIL BASIC MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES EFFECTIVELY AT THE PRIMARY CARE LEVEL (PHC STAFF TRAINING AND PILOT SUCCESSFULLY EXECUTED)

THE YOUTH

- NIGERIA IS A COUNTRY WITH A YOUNG POPULATION.
- IF 'YOUTH' IS DEFINED AS THE SEGMENT OF THE POPULATION 25 YEARS AND BELOW, OVER 50% OF THE NIGERIAN POPULATION MAY BE SAID TO FALL INTO THAT CATEGORY.
- VERY IMPORTANT DEMOGRAPHIC GROUP IN TERMS OF PRESENT AND FUTURE HEALTH NEEDS AND TRENDS

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES IN YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH?

- SUBSTANTIALLY THE SAME AS THE NEEDS OF THE ADULT POPULATION, BUT WITH SOME UNIQUE FEATURES AND SOME AREAS OF MAJOR EMPHASIS
- STATISTICS:

LAGOS STATE MENTAL HEALTH SURVEY (2015) LOOKED AT A REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE OF THE POPULATION OVER 18 YEARS

- 5.5% HAD MAJOR DEPRESSIVE DISORDER (MMD)
- 3.5% HAD GENERALISED ANXIETY DISORDER (GAD)
- 7.8% HAD HAD SUICIDAL IDEAS IN THE PAST ONE MONTH
- 7.3% HAD ALCOHOL USE DISORDERS
- 2.8% HAD PSYCHO-ACTIVE SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS

FOCUS ON YOUTH NEEDS

- THE LAST THREE ENTRIES SHOULD BE OF PARTICULAR INTEREST - ONE BECAUSE OF THE RECENT SPATE OF SENSATIONAL SUICIDE REPORTS LOCALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY, AND THE LAST TWO BECAUSE SUBSTANCE MISUSE ISSUES AMONG THE YOUTHS ARE THE MAJOR FOCUS OF TODAY'S ENGAGEMENT.
- THE PROBLEM OF SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS IS OF PARTICULAR RELEVANCE TO THE YOUTHFUL POPULATION. MOST PEOPLE WHO TAKE CANNABIS, FOR INSTANCE, OR WHO TAKE PSYCHO-ACTIVE SUBSTANCES – WHETHER STIMULANTS LIKE ECSTASY, COCAINE AND CRACK, OR CNS DEPRESSANTS, SUCH AS CODEINE AND TRAMADOL, USUALLY START IN THE COMPANY OF THEIR FRIENDS FROM SECONDARY SCHOOL OR UNIVERSITY AGE.
- THE SAME GOES FOR CIGARETTE SMOKING, A PARTICULAR SCOURGE WHICH TENDS TO PASS UNDER THE RADAR BECAUSE THERE IS NOT SUFFICIENT ADVOCACY TO ALERT THE POPULATION ABOUT HOW DANGEROUS IT IS, AND ALSO BECAUSE THERE IS A DELIBERATE HIGH FUNDED INITIATIVE, WHICH I CALL 'THE CIGARETTE WARS' TO ENSURE THE SURVIVAL OF THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY BY TARGETING YOUTHS AS FRESH RECRUITS THROUGH SLEEK ADVERTISING AND SPONSORSHIP OF MUSICAL CONCERTS AND OTHER EVENTS FAVOURED BY YOUTHFUL AUDIENCE

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES IN YOUTH MENTAL ILLNESS, AND HOW MAY THEY BE ADDRESSED TO AID UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE

- AS IN ADULTS, OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF MENTAL HEALTH 'CASES' WILL BE OF ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION.
- DRUG USE PROBLEMS OF VARIOUS CATEGORIES ARE GETTING INCREASINGLY RAMPANT
- CURRENTLY PROBLEMS NOT RECEIVING SIGNIFICANT RECOGNITION OR INTERVENTION. FEWER THAN 70% PRESENT FOR CARE
- PART OF THE REASON IS STIGMA. PART IS ALSO BECAUSE OF THE COST BARRIER, AS UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE (THROUGH A COMPULSORY HEALTH INSURANCE POLICY) IS YET TO BE IMPLEMENTED.
- THERE ARE ALREADY PROBLEMS ANTICIPATED EVEN BEYOND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CUMPULSORY HEALTH INSURANCE. ONE OF THESE IS THAT CHRONIC MENTAL DISORDERS MAY FALL INTO AN EXCLUSION CATEGORY

A STRATEGY FOR ACHIEVING GOOD MENTAL HEALTH FOR THE YOUTH IN THE CONTEXT OF UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE

- THE BILL FOR DEALING WITH THE SERVICE DELIVERY COSTS OF THE EXPANDING NUMBER OF YOUTHS WHO WILL BE NEEDING MENTAL HEALTH CARE IF THINGS (SUCH AS BURGEONING SUBSTANCE USE PROBLEMS) CONTINUE TO INCREASE AT THE PRESENT RATE WILL BE CRIPPLING EVEN FOR A COMPULSORY AND WELL FUNDED INSURANCE SYSTEM.
- EDUCATION AND PREVENTION NEED TO BE INTRODUCED NOW AND RAMPED UP IN SCALE TO TACKLE ALL DIMENSIONS OF THE PROBLEM
- THE ANTI STIGMA CAMPAIGN SHOULD BE SEEN AS A PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE AND NOT AN ISSUE FOR MENTAL HEALTH WORKERS ALONE

STRATEGY II

- WITH REGARD TO SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER, A COMBINATION OF REDUCING THE AVAILABILITY OF THE HARMFUL SUBSTANCE FOR ILLICIT USE, DECRIMINALISATION OF PERSONAL USE SO THAT VICTIMS ARE ENCOURAGED TO SEEK TREATMENT EARLY AND WITHOUT FEAR OF 'HARASSMENT' FROM LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS WOULD BE GOOD MEASURES TO TAKE.
- MASSIVE AND SUSTAINED ADVOCACY, WITH THE FORMATION OF DRUG FREE CLUBS IN SCHOOLS, THE RECRUITMENT OF POWERFUL ROLE MODELS SUCH AS POPULAR MUSICIANS AS ADVOCATES OF A DRUG FREE LIFE STYLE ARE STEPS THAT ARE CHEAPER AND LIKELY TO REDUCE FUTURE COST BURDEN OF TREATING ESTABLISHED ADDICTS.

THE 'SPECIAL' ISSUE OF ALCOHOL 'ADVERTISEMENT'

- RECALL THE HEINEKEN SPONSORSHIP OF FIFA EVENTS, INCLUDING THE ONGOING WORLD CUP ('THE CAMPAIGN TO DRINK RESPONSIBLY')
- VERY SLEEK, VERY EFFECTIVE.
- TRUE – IT TALKS ABOUT 'DRINKING RESPONSIBLY', AND EMPHASISES THE AGE LIMIT OF 18.
- HOWEVER IT IS PROBABLY ENCOURAGING MORE PEOPLE, INCLUDING THE YOUTHS TO DRINK BEER, 'LAUNDERING THE IMAGE OF 'DIAGEO' AS A RESPONSIBLE CORPORATE CITIZEN, AND RAKING IN MASSIVE PROFITS FOR THE COMPANY.
- ALCOHOL USE DISORDER IS CERTAINLY A PROBLEM IN NIGERIA AND ELSEWHERE. UP TO HALF OF MAJOR RTAS ON NIGERIAN HIGHWAYS INVOLVE A DRIVER WITH ABOVE-NORMAL LEVELS OF ALCOHOL IN HIS BLOODSTREAM. CIRRHOSIS AND LIVER CANCER AND OTHER MAJOR ILLNESSES ARE ALSO AT A SIGNIFICANT LEVEL IN NIGERIAN SOCIETY, MUCH OF IT DIRECTLY ATTRIBUTABLE TO EXCESSIVE ALCOHOL USE

THE CIGARETTE WARS

- ONE OF THE RICHEST, LONGEST ESTABLISHED COMPANIES IN NIGERIA IS BRITISH-AMERICAN TOBACCO.
- THEY SUPPORT TOBACCO FARMERS IN RURAL WESTERN NIGERIA, AND THEIR PRESENCE HAS BEEN A BLESSING TO MANY FARMERS AND THEIR FAMILIES BECAUSE OF THE ENHANCED INCOME
- HOWEVER CIGARETTE (WITH NICOTINE) IS A MAJOR SUBSTANCE OF ABUSE. THE COST OF THE DELETERIOUS CONSEQUENCES – FROM CANCER TO OTHER HEALTH CONSEQUENCES – IS ALSO MASSIVE AND GROWING.
- EFFECTIVE LEGISLATION HAS BANNED THE ADVERTISEMENT OF CIGARETTES IN MANY WESTERN COUNTRIES. COMPANIES ARE ALSO COMPELLED TO CARRY STARK WARNING MESSAGES ON CIGARETTE PACKS.
- CONTROL MORE LAX HERE, AND GOVERNMENT IS EITHER AMBIVALENT OR IGNORANT (OR BOTH). EXAMPLE – WHEN BAT OPENED ITS BIG FACTORY IN IBADAN SOME YEARS AGO, THE SERVING MINISTER OF STATE FOR HEALTH REPRESENTED THE PRESIDENT AS THE SPECIAL GUEST AT THE EVENT!
- BECAUSE OF THE DECLINE IN SMOKERS IN THE WEST AND THE REDUCING NUMBERS OF SMOKERS, THERE IS A DELIBERATE STRATEGY OF THESE MASSIVE COMPANIES (SUCH AS PHILIP MORRIS) TO TARGET YOUNG PEOPLE IN NIGERIA AND THE REST OF AFRICA, AS WELL AS ASIA). THE LOGIC IS THAT IT WILL GUARANTEE THEIR CONSUMER BASE FOR THE NEXT GENERATION.
- THE STRATEGY IS WORKING.
- THE COST OF TREATING THE CONSEQUENCES IS HIGH AND WILL CONTINUE TO INCREASE.
- LAGOS STATE SOME YEARS AGO INSTITUTED A CLASS-ACTION SUIT AGAINST THE CIGARETTE INDUSTRY, SEEKING REIMBURSEMENT FOR THE MONEY IT SPENT TREATING THE RAVAGES OF TOBACCO ON LAGOS CITIZENS. NOTHING HAS BEEN HEARD OF THE SUIT SINCE.
- THERE IS EVEN A SUBSISTING TOBACCO CONTROL BILL (SPONSORED BY SENATOR MAMORA) WHICH IS SUPPOSED TO HAVE BEEN SIGNED INTO LAW SOME YEARS AGO. NOTHING HAS BEEN HEARD OF IT LATELY.
- IT CONTINUES TO BE 'BUSINESS AS USUAL' ON THE TOBACCO FRONT

A FINAL WORD, IN OPENING

- IN SETTING OFF WHAT I TRUST WILL BE A DAY OF ENGAGING AND IMPACTFUL DISCUSSION, I WOULD LIKE TO RECOMMEND THAT IN ALL THE DIFFERENT AREAS WE SHALL TOUCH, ESPECIALLY AS CONCERNS SUBSTANCE USE PROBLEMS AND THE YOUTH, A SPECIAL FOCUS SHOULD BE PUT ON PREVENTION THROUGH EDUCATION AND PROPERLY TARGETED ADVOCACY. ULTIMATELY SUCH A STRATEGY, OF COURSE COMPLEMENTED WITH EFFECTIVE AVAILABLE AND ACCESSIBLE TREATMENTS, WILL BE THE MOST COST-EFFECTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE WAY OF ENSURING THAT THE MENTAL HEALTH OF THE YOUTH OF NIGERIA IS KEPT AT AN OPTIMUM LEVEL GOING FORWARD

FINALLY.....

