



September 2023

News from the WPA Working Group on Digitalization in Mental Health

The WHO EUROMHCoalition recently announced some Updates including the following information on the *Working Package 6 on mental health service transformation*:

"Digitalization in Mental Health:



On **September 7, 2023**, together with our colleagues from the Digital Health Unit at WHO Europe and in collaboration with the WHO Collaborating Centre on Quality Assurance and Empowerment in Mental Health, LVR Klinikum Düsseldorf, Department of Psychiatry & Psychotherapy of the Heinrich Heine University in Düsseldorf, we will host an engaging discussion on *digitalization in mental health*. This event aims to explore innovative approaches and transformative strategies in order to identify the building blocks for a roadmap for digital mental health in the WHO European Region. It builds upon a workshop on Big Data analytics and Artificial Intelligence in Mental Health held in Copenhagen in December 2022."

This hybrid one-day meeting took place in the beautiful city of **Porto (Portugal)** on Sept. 7 under the leadership of WHO EURO (Dr. Ledia Lazeri, Regional Adviser, Mental Health Flagship, Division of Country Health Policies and Systems, WHO Regional Office for Europe, Copenhagen, Denmark), the WHO CC DEU-131, and the WPA Working Group on Digitalisation in Mental Health & Care, both under the leadership of Prof. Wolfgang Gaebel (Düsseldorf, Germany).

This meeting was co-organized with the preceding 2nd WHO Symposium on the *Future of Health Systems in a Digital Era*, also in Porto, Sept 5 and 6, opened by the Regional Director of WHO EURO, Dr. Hans Kluge, and health political representatives from Portugal, with international experts in the field and resulting relevant insights from panel discussions (on *Artificial Intelligence*, the *Critical role of governance, investment and evaluation in transforming digital health practice*, and on *Equity and inclusion at the heart of European health systems of the future*), complemented by many thematically

related symposia. In a well-attended invited symposium on *Harnessing the power of emerging technologies for better mental health* with speakers from Germany, The Netherlands, Spain and Scotland, and under moderation of Dr. Lazeri, Prof. Gaebel gave a talk on "Integrating digital mental health into existing healthcare systems."



The one-day meeting agenda of Sept 7, with invited experts from various countries of the European Region, including governmental representatives, policy makers, mental healthcare providers, researchers, consumer organisations, and the organizers from WHO EURO including WHO Country Offices, WHO CCs, and the WPA, EPA, MHE, Gamian, and others, was focusing on the chosen theme of "Towards a Roadmap on Digitalisation in Mental Health for Transforming Mental Health Systems in the WHO European Region". Throughout the meeting, Dr. Lazeri and Prof. Gaebel were moderating the sessions with presentations given, e.g., on *Setting the scene: where we are now and where we want to go*, and *Digitalisation in MHC&C of WPA Member Countries – Findings of a Global Survey* (initiated and organized by the WPA Action Plan Working Group on Digitalisation in MH&C, actively supported by the WPA NPA members, the Zonal representatives, the Secretariat and the President himself), both by Prof. Wolfgang Gaebel as

input for further discussion. More presentations were given by Ana Tijerino Inestroza (online), Technical Officer, Mental Health, Division of Country Health Policies and Systems, WHO EURO, on *Service Needs for European Mental Health*, and by Keyrellus Adib, Technical Officer, Data and Digital Health, Division of Country Health Policies and Systems, WHO EURO on *Digital Health Action Plan & Digital Mental Health*.

Péter Kéry, President of Gamian Europe, was presenting on *Digital Mental Health meeting the needs of service users*, starting into a session on *Qualitative Digital Country Examples and Partners' Initiatives*, with in-person and digital contributions. To name only a few of the in-person voices of this program part, Prof. Umberto Volpe, Chair of the EPA-Section on Digital Psychiatry and Co-Chair of the WPA Section on Digitalisation in MHC, Chris Wright, National Advisor for Digital Mental Health, Head of Programme, NHS Scotland, and Prof. Heleen Riper, Clinical Psychology VU & Amsterdam University Medical Centre, Dept. of Psychiatry, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, all informed about their related work and own country - without disregarding all the other experts in person and online with their very relevant contribution of their experiences and actions.

As a special highlight of this meeting, Prof. Afzal Javed, President of the WPA, gave a key message on "Digitalisation in mental health" and its importance for the further plans and actions of WPA and its interaction with European and global partners in the field. In this context he stressed the impact of the WPA global digital survey and its importance for focusing the collaboration with the WPA member NPAs, countries, zones, zonal representatives and the regions for a regional and global approach on implementing and upscaling digital mental health.

A final discussion round of the meeting for all participants with break-out groups, guided by 3 facilitators (W. Gaebel, K. Adib, C. Wright), moderated by L. Lazeri, and accompanied by a rapporteur (M. Hoekstra), was focusing around three overarching issues (governance, norms & standards; Capacity; Infrastructure, horizon scanning & scale-up) aiming to operationalize the roadmap for a stepwise approach to digitalising and transforming mental health care for the European Region in the years to come. It was clear for the group that digitalisation does not automatically change the health

systems, that both need to make steps on reflecting about themselves, learning from each other and becoming receptive for a process of transformation on both sides. This insight was also one conclusion of the preceding 2nd WHO symposium, thus following an initial statement of the WHO Regional Director that it is all about the “health of the person“ we need to strive for by using the „means“ of digitalisation.

The group decided to reconvene online in fall to discuss and decide next steps based on the minutes and recordings of these extremely productive meetings in Porto.

Author: Prof. Wolfgang Gaebel, Chair of Working Group on Digitalization in Mental Health