Romania: Mental Health as a public health problem
In Romania, the concept of MH came to attention at the beginning of the 1990’s, as a result of the splitting of the clinical concept of psychiatry into MH and psychiatry (seen separately as a medical specialty).

This moment coincided with the unveiling/acceptance of the social, ethical, community aspects of psychiatry, as well as the increasing awareness of MH as a public health issue.
Promoters of the new Mental Health approach

- **Romanian Government and Ministry of Public Health**, especially after 2004, when a strategy and an action plan on MH reform were elaborated.

- **The civil society** - individuals and organizations that took on the job of promoting human and civil rights.

- Pressure from **the media**

- **MH professionals**

- **International community**
Mental Health Policy Principles

- The responsibility of the community team
- Participation of the community
- Accessibility of services
- Balance among the system components
- Quality and continuity of care
- Minimal restrictive alternatives
- Accent on rehabilitation
- Specialization of care
- Involvement of the beneficiaries and their families in the care process
- Evidence-based clinical and community practice
Towards a public health approach

Mental Health as a public health priority

Prevention  Legislative measures  Infrastructure  Resources human / financial  Mentality / integrated approach

Romanian Ministry of Public Health
Action Plan for MH - Prevention

- MH promotion and prevention
  - Increasing public awareness related to MH problems
  - Mental health promotion in schools
  - Occupational health and MH promotion at workplace
  - Prevention of violence
  - Prevention of substance abuse (in collaboration with the National Anti-Drug Agency, in order to develop integrated policies)

- Vulnerable groups
  - eg: The Ministry of Public Health is aware of the possible impact on the mental health of children with parents working abroad, and prepares a strategy for detection and intervention for this vulnerable group
Legislative measures that support public mental health initiatives

  - improves the quality of and access to mental health care facilities
  - Mental health promotion and prevention of mental illness
  - improves social and legal position of persons with mental disorders
  - Assessment of mental health and diagnostic procedures
  - Mental health care services
  - Admission to a psychiatric unit

- Secondary legislation (2005-6) describe the new system of care:
  - procedures of involuntary admissions / treatment
  - restrictions on rights and freedoms / right to complain
  - confidentiality issues
  - Psychiatric sectorization
  - Community mental health services

- MH Strategy and Implementation Action Plan of the Romanian MoPH
- Ministerial order for establishment of CMH Centers
- Ministerial order for establishment of the National Center for MH
Infrastructure

- 38 mental hospitals and 75 psychiatric departments in general hospitals
- 16,700 beds (76/100,000 inhabitants); 4,800 are for chronic patients
- 66 Mental Health Laboratories (outpatient services)
- Community mental health services are only experimental;
- Services for elderly people are underdeveloped
- Sheltered housing projects are only experimental
- The care model is old fashioned (not client centred).
Infrastructure - development and modernization

- Infrastructure modernization for 75 psychiatric hospital or psychiatric wards in general hospitals
- Community Mental Health Centers
  - Catchments area of 100,000 - 150,000 inhabitants
  - Establishment of 10 community mental health centers (2006)
  - 61 Community Centers for infrastructure development (2007)
- The different units of the CMHC (as the outreach or the rehabilitation unit) can be located geographically in different sites, but the **therapeutic team** is seen as the whole staff from one given catchments area
Financing

- Financial support for infrastructure for 75 psychiatric hospital or psychiatric wards in general hospitals (20 million Euros)
- 61 Community Centers supported for infrastructure development (9,5 million Euros)
- Institutional development programs, under the coordination of the National Center for MH, for program development, prevention of avoidable hospitalizations and prevention for overcrowding acute wards (9 pilot hospitals included in the program in 2007)
- Training and antistigma programs
- Financing of 110 monitors of patients rights in mental hospitals
- 100 % reimbursement for major drugs used in psychiatric pathology
Human resources

- Low number of psychiatrists (4.2/100000 - most of them in big cities) - Training of 300 residents in psychiatry
- Development of community care: 31 Community Centers included in training programs for the staff on topics related to community care, human rights and psychosocial intervention programs (training programs delivered by the National Center for MH)
- Employment of 110 monitors of patients rights in mental hospitals
- General practitioners are not equipped for their role in dealing with patients with mental health problems
  - programs for improving the skills of GP’s dealing with current MH problems in primary care (depression, anxiety, unexplained medical symptoms): the National Center for Mental Health will start training for GP’s in the fall of 2007 on the most frequent MH problems
  - First trainings to be completed for general practitioners in recognition and short interventions related to problematic alcohol use
- There is a shortage of nursing personnel
- There is a shortage of social workers in the mental health services
- The number of clinical psychologists is modest
Mentality / integrated approach

- For professionals
- For hospitals - new model of care
  - Quality improvement of hospital services - starting 2007
  - Case management
  - Increasing the staff/patient ratio
  - Management training
- Users involvement - only one users association
- NGOs
  - Promoters of mental health reform
  - Developed only in main cities
  - framework for co-operation with the MoPH
- Antistigma programs
Increasing public awareness and anti-stigma actions - 2007

- The Ministry of Public Health supports 5 local anti-stigma campaigns, under the supervision of the National Center for MH

- 2007 - First national survey conducted on public attitudes towards persons with MH problems (partnership of the National Center for MH, the Romanian Academy and the Media Monitoring Agency)

- Action Plan of the Romanian Ministry of Public Health forsees further support for anti-stigma action, both nationally and locally for the next 5 years
Conclusions

- MH is a priority of the MoPH, both in terms of service development and in the field of promotion and prevention.
- Integrated MH perspective: at the primary/secondary care level, in schools, at the workplaces, as well as promoting MH for the general public.
- Develop community mental health centres.
- Quality improvement of hospital services and infrastructure.
- Training and education.
- Implementation of the Law on Mental Health.
- Users involvement.
- Antistigma programs.
- Cooperation with NGO’s.
- Impact studies - starting 2009, in order to evaluate the acceptability and success of mental health promotion and prevention programs.