

EPR National Awareness Raising Event

Mental Health in Employment

Report

21 June 2022

Amersfoort, The Netherlands

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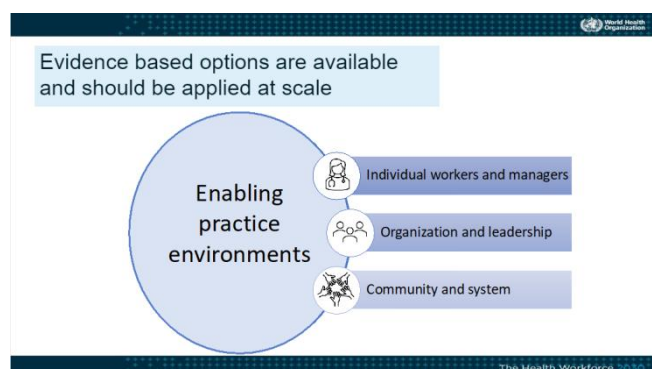
On June 21st, EPR organised in collaboration with the Dutch International Mental Health Hub and de Nederlandse ggz the National Awareness Raising Event “Mental Health in Employment: Supporting professionals delivering services to people with mental health issues or a disability” in Amersfoort, The Netherlands. The meeting, that was live streamed on Zoom, was joined by 14 people in-person and 19 online including EPR members Fundación INTRAS, Theotokos, Cedar Foundation and Fundación Rey Ardid.

Welcome and EPR Presentation

Alicia Gómez Campos, Senior Public Affairs and Community Officer at EPR kicked-off the event presenting EPR’s mission, work, activities and expertise highlighting the work the organisation does in mental health, as well as the objectives of EPR national awareness raising events, such as reaching multiple actors at national level, influencing certain policies of the sector, or making known the work of EPR to national actors and service providers to people with disabilities; Vivian Hemmelder, Network Coordinator at the Dutch International Mental Health Hub, welcomed the participants on behalf of her organisation.

Panel 1 "Global and EU level policy initiatives tackling mental health at work"

Alicia gave the floor to the first speakers of the panel, Meredith Fendt-Newlin and Catherine Kane, Technical Officers for Health Workforce at WHO, who made a presentation about mental health and wellbeing of health and care workers. They explained how the Covid-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on these professionals’ mental wellbeing, with an increase in anxiety, stress,



depression and burnout, making this issue an urgent global health priority. Then they informed the audience about two key policy initiatives of the WHO in this area: the development of [Guidelines on mental health at work](#) that will be published by the end of 2022 and the WHO Global Health and Care Worker Compact, which provides a framework to support professionals through prevention, inclusion and rights protection.



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The second presentation was made by Heather Rogers and Christos Lionis from the Expert Panel on Effective Ways of Investing in Health, an independent group established by the European Commission. They presented the Opinion titled "[Supporting Mental Health of the Health Workforce and Other Essential Workers](#)", focusing on some key insights, such as the influence of the workplace on mental health and the importance of inter-sectorial and multi-stage policy interventions. They also gave an overview of the support programs, legislation and initiatives that are already available and/or funded by the EU.

Nayla Glaise, President of Eurocadres, presented her organisation's work on occupational health and safety, providing data about stress among EU workers. Then she described the campaign "EndStress.EU", which brings together over 40 organisations and aims to boost efforts at EU level to better involve workers in the policy process, improve work organisation and provide effective tools to address work-related stress and other psychosocial factors.



Dorota Sienkiewicz, Senior Policy Coordinator at EuroHealthNet/EU Alliance for mental health & work, closed the first panel with a presentation on the guidelines that EuroHealthNet is developing to tackle the impact of psychosocial risk on older workers' health. The guidelines stress the need to improve flexible working and mentoring of older workers, to promote tailored work goals and to provide social and psychological support.

Panel 2 "The practical side: European and Dutch initiatives addressed at professionals"

Alicia gave the floor to Margot Joosen, Senior Researcher at Tilburg University, who made a presentation on how to promote mental wellbeing of healthcare professionals. She highlighted the risk of healthcare workers leaving the profession in mass (75% of the workforce by 2025, according to an article on [Forbes](#)) and stressed the need for work value interventions as a way to help professionals to find a positive meaning in their work and improve their wellbeing.



The second speaker was a EPR member Breeda Doherty, Regional Quality Assurance Manager at Cedar Foundation. She spoke about Cedar's mental health and wellbeing strategy for its staff, which includes actions at the individual, team and organisational level. The strategy focuses on prevention, early intervention and on providing staff with an agile working policy and adequate resources (e.g. mental health awareness training, online portal of resources on mental health, events, access to independent and individual support through the Westfield Health staff package).

EPR member Jorge Lopez Martín, Human Resources Officer at Fundación INTRAS, illustrated the ways the organisation supports its staff. In addition to economic and professional support, staff at INTRAS can follow courses on mental health: one on therapeutic accompaniment, which provides information about anxiety in professional care; “Be Mindful”, a course about tailor-made mindfulness training programs; the “Wilderness Therapy” course, with a conceptual approach to therapy through adventure. Other initiatives include sports, acting and the use of a smart watch that detects the heartbeat, unusual behaviours or falls, and helps to maintain low levels of stress.

The last speaker of the panel was Vassia Sarantopoulou, Head Psychologist, CEO & Founder of AntiLoneliness. She spoke about burnout and compassion fatigue in mental health professionals, which have become an increasing risk worldwide. She outlined the groups that are more exposed to burnout, its symptoms and main causes, which include the nature of the work, the pandemic, chronic staff shortages and a lack of awareness of the importance of self-care. She then outlined some of the ways to help professionals, such as peer support, therapy and emotional awareness.

At the end of the presentations a participant made a question to Jorge about any initiative INTRAS has to combat stigmatisation of mental health. Jorge replied that professionals try to normalise the topic of mental health by working together, talking about it and joining group activities. In the organisation there are many psychologists who lead programs like storytelling, where each individual experience counts.

Speaker Margriet Formanoy agreed with Margot Joosen on acting more proactive than reactive and found the work-value intervention very interesting. She asked about employees’ participation rates in the intervention. Margot explained that participants are departments that take part as a whole unit, including HR, developmental and managerial departments, in order to effectively promote mental health wellbeing at all levels. She added that mental health should be supported by the whole organisation and supervisors should be supported by their managers. Margriet also asked Breeda Doherty why Northern Ireland has such a high prevalence of mental health issues. Breeda explained that its recent history and economic underdevelopment are the main reasons.

Panel 3 "Looking at Dutch projects"

The first speaker of the last panel was Hans te Brake, Senior Policy Advisor R&D at ARQ National Psychotrauma Center. He presented the work ARQ has done to develop guidelines of psychosocial support for Dutch healthcare professionals affected by the Covid pandemic. He underlined that Covid has revealed missing elements in psychosocial support in health professionals and that the development of these guidelines involved all stakeholders, including employers and employees, medical specialists and the ministry of health care. This initiative also highlighted the importance of the team and colleagues at work, essential for dealing with stress.

Margriet Formanoy, Project Manager for mental health at work at Trimbos Instituut, made a presentation about a research the Institute conducted to assess the impact of Covid on the work and mental wellbeing of mental health care professionals. A digital questionnaire was sent out to 2055 professionals in 2020 and the results showed an increase in stress and workload due to Covid, as well as a decrease in mental wellbeing and social interactions. The recommendations developed focus on decreasing work load and promoting sustainable employability and professionals’ participation in decision making. Margriet also mentioned key workplace factors that influence mental health, such as organisational culture, balance and psychological protection. She then quickly presented another set of guidelines based on a 4-step approach that the Institute is



developing to prevent mental complaints in health care professionals.

The last presentation was made by Mariia Shaidrova and Irina Petrenko, psychologists working for the Department of the Displaced People Unit of “Help for Ukraine”, a foundation based in the Netherlands which brings together psychologists and professionals volunteering to help. They shared with the audience their personal experience providing psychological support to Ukrainian refugees arrived in the Netherlands or still displaced in Ukraine, who get in touch with them through social media and text messages. They explained the types of support provided according to age groups and the challenges they face as professionals, including the need for psychologists to be supported and to avoid burnout.

Background



- The launch of **help-ukraine.nl**, operative since the beginning of March, providing all relevant information for Displaced people.
- Weekly Newsletter (1600+ subscribers).
- A telegram, voice and email support line (up to 600 requests).
- A database with **300+ volunteer translators**.
- A psychological support team with a database of **80+ Ukrainian psychologists** (100 clients helped).



Vivian thanked Mariia and Irina and said that this event can be useful for them to make connections. Mariia explained that the issue is that Ukrainian psychologists in the Netherlands cannot work without a national registration number, so they act only as volunteers. They are trying to provide coaching and general support and to create a group of at least 20 specialists with experience in trauma who can work under the supervision of Dutch trauma specialists so that there is always a possibility of further referral in emergency cases.

Conclusion

Alicia thanked on behalf of EPR all the speakers and the participants for taking part in the event. For those who attended in person, a networking lunch was organised to give them the opportunity to keep exchanging views on the topics discussed and get to know each other better.

Evaluation

Participants gave the meeting an average of 4.13 including the areas of knowledge, expectations met and program of the meeting. Participants highlighted their satisfaction with the high-level speakers and the variety of topics discussed. They appreciated very much that some of the speakers were in person, as they were easier to follow. The area of format and time received a lower score, mainly due to technical issues related to the hybrid set up at the beginning, which delayed a bit the start of the event.

