
EDITORIAL

Health Literacy in Mental Health: Interdisciplinary Paths Towards a More Conscious Future

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Health literacy in mental health has become an increasingly prioritized issue in public health agendas and global discussions on well-being and quality of life. More than mere technical knowledge of mental disorders, it involves the ability to recognize warning signs, seek help effectively, and contribute to building a more empathetic and inclusive society. In a context where mental health is still shrouded in stigma and misinformation, literacy emerges as one of the most powerful tools for individual and collective empowerment.

Reports from the World Health Organization (WHO) indicate that one in four people will experience a mental health issue in their lifetime, highlighting the urgent need for an informed and structured approach. Additionally, the WHO's Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020 underscores the importance of mental health literacy in combating stigma and facilitating access to adequate care. Globally, efforts to promote mental health literacy have intensified, especially following the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which exacerbated mental well-being issues across all segments of the population.

However, several challenges persist, such as resource scarcity, insufficient professional training, and resistance to the use of new technologies. The pandemic has underscored the importance of digital literacy in mental health, emphasizing the need for digital platforms that ensure access to quality information. New technologies, such as telemedicine and e-health programs, provide an opportunity to expand information access and reduce treatment barriers, but they must be inclusive in combating the digital divide, particularly in more isolated areas.

Another significant challenge is combating the stigma associated with mental conditions. Despite advancements in awareness, stigma still limits access to necessary care and support. Literacy campaigns must be sensitive to cultural specificities to promote broader acceptance of mental health issues, ensuring they are treated with the same seriousness as physical conditions.

Equity in access to care and resources is also a critical barrier. Socioeconomic and geographic inequalities continue to hinder access to quality mental health services. For mental health literacy to become a universal reality, initiatives must be tailored to diverse social realities, ensuring everyone has fair access to knowledge and healthcare.

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The future of mental health literacy depends on fostering interdisciplinary collaboration. The WHO's World Health Report 2020 highlights the importance of integrating multiple disciplines such as public health, psychology, education, and technology to address global mental health challenges. This approach allows for knowledge sharing among professionals from different fields, improving communication and creating more effective strategies to increase mental health literacy across all age groups.

The role of educational institutions, professional associations, and governments is vital in promoting this collaboration. Public policies should support ongoing training and the creation of support networks involving different sectors of society. Only through this coordination can we promote a more aware society prepared to deal with the complexities of mental health.

My experience collaborating with professionals and researchers from Portugal and Brazil has shown that, despite cultural and structural differences, there are important points of convergence. Both countries recognize the need to adopt interdisciplinary approaches that combine technical knowledge with awareness strategies adapted to cultural contexts. This exchange of experiences among professionals from both countries has demonstrated the value of sharing best practices and creating collaborative networks, essential for developing more integrated and effective responses in the field of mental health literacy.

Disseminating information, promoting collaborative practices, and integrating new technologies are essential steps toward building a more conscious society prepared to address mental health issues. The journal Context & Health, by bringing this topic to debate, plays a crucial role in reflecting on the future of mental health. We must continue to explore innovative, collaborative, and inclusive solutions to ensure that mental health literacy becomes a reality accessible to all.

REFERENCES

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