

Minutes from GMHRG meeting 4th of May 2018.

Present:

David Sam, Melf Kuhl, Christine Ødegaard, Ketil Ødegaard, Marit Hafting, Catherine Schwinger, Ingunn Engebretsen, Solveig Kolaas, Neyzang Wangmo, Tehmina Mustafa

Agenda:

- Overview of UiB Medical Faculty's student exchange activities in psychiatry/child psychiatry and related research projects (K. Ødegaard) - 20 min. followed by 10 min. discussion
- Overview of the mental health situation and services in Bhutan (Dr. Neyzang) – 30 min. followed by 15 min discussion

Ingunn Engebretsen chaired the meeting; she gave an overview of the work of CIH, and the RG and introduced the presenters.

Ketil presented the Zanzibar project, funded by Health Bergen and Trond Mohn fund the project. The project encompasses the construction of a mental ward as part of Haukeland SH partnering hospital in Stone Town, Zanzibar. Ketil looks into funding for a research project at Zanzibar, to develop research capacity and to improve clinical practice. A short and lively discussion followed, mainly discussing the sustainability of this project design.

Neyzang gave her presentation about the mental health situation in Bhutan, including much contextual knowledge on life in Bhutan and the unique health care system. Traditional and Western medicine are both free and accessible to the people, in theory. However, especially the rural population faces challenges in access. While the infrastructure is deemed adequate, the government lays focus on improving care quality. Medical education and capacity building is limited by the necessity to study medicine abroad.

With a focus on mental health, the relatively high suicide rates, were presented concerning. While the rate is at international average, the shadow figure is perceived to be relatively high. Prevention in mental health is not a strong branch of medical services in Bhutan. A stigma of mental illnesses remains, and the public's awareness needs to be raised towards these issues.

Questioned what the most imminent needs in mental health are in terms of (a) education and (b) health care services, Ms. Neyzang estimated that mental health awareness in nurse training and suicide and mental health prevention in services are the most urgent aspects to address. However, she pointed out that this needed confirmation from the public authorities responsible for the health sector.

The Bhutan conference on medical and health sciences 2018, November 2018, offers a great opportunity to interact with Bhutanese stakeholders in the health sector and to present research results.

A smaller discussion followed to evaluate the potential for collaborations between UiB and the University of Bhutan. These initial discussions were fruitful and will continue in preparation two GMHRG members' visit, Solveig Kolaas and David Sam, to Bhutan in November 2018.