

Mental health as a collective commitment: Humanization, prevention, and changing perspectives

Saúde mental como compromisso coletivo: Humanização, prevenção e mudança de olhares

Salud mental como compromiso colectivo: Humanización, prevención y transformación de miradas

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Mental health has increasingly assumed a central place in contemporary discussions on health care. In a context marked by deep social changes, the weakening of social bonds, intensification of work demands, structural inequalities, and the persistent impacts of public health and humanitarian crises, it has become impossible to separate comprehensive care from qualified mental health care¹. For health professionals, historically committed to direct, continuous, and humane care, this challenge is not just technical, but also ethical, political, and social.

Promoting awareness of mental health care first requires recognizing that psychological distress is part of the human experience and affects individuals at different stages of the life course. This understanding shifts the focus away from a reductionist view that associates mental health solely with the presence of psychiatric disorders, allowing for a broader perspective that considers the social, cultural, economic, and relational determinants influencing psychological well-being¹. Health professionals, working across all levels of care, are strategically positioned to sustain this expanded and sensitive perspective.

Despite conceptual advances and the development of public policies aimed at strengthening mental health care, stigma remains one of the most significant barriers to accessing high-quality mental health care. To stigmatize is to limit a person to a diagnosis, to silence their history, and to disregard their potential². In daily health care practice, stigma may manifest through subtle attitudes, such as discrediting complaints, normalizing suffering, or prematurely labeling individuals, or through more explicit forms of exclusion and marginalization. Challenging stigma is therefore a fundamental responsibility of health professionals, who must reaffirm, in their practice, the dignity, singularity, and autonomy of every person receiving care.

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Person-centered mental health care extends beyond the adoption of empathetic rhetoric; it is comprehended through daily practices grounded in skilled listening, therapeutic alliance, supportive engagement, and respect for individual trajectories³. To humanize care is to recognize the other as a subject of rights, possessing knowledge about their own lived experience, rather than as a passive recipient of interventions. In this sense, health professionals play an essential role in establishing therapeutic relationships sustained by presence, availability, and shared responsibility in care.

Changing perspectives on mental health also requires broadening our understanding of who requires care. It is not limited to individuals experiencing severe psychological distress, but includes children, adolescents, adults, and older adults exposed to contexts of vulnerability; workers affected by excessive demands; students pressured by performance expectations; and families going through loss and uncertainty. Mental health is a cross-cutting field that permeates all spaces of care and demands integrated, interdisciplinary, and continuous actions.¹

Within this framework, strengthening individual potential emerges as a fundamental axis of care. By recognizing individuals' capacities, internal resources, and support networks, health professionals contribute to care processes that extend beyond symptom reduction to promote autonomy, agency, and hope^{4,5}. Valuing human potential means affirming the possibility of reconstructing life projects even in the presence of suffering and understanding that mental health care is also a space for meaning-making and the affirmation of life.

The perspective of preventive psychiatry and mental health promotion strengthens the need for early, educational, and community-based interventions⁶. Investing in preventive actions is not merely a matter of reducing costs or avoiding future complications, but of affirming an ethical commitment to anticipatory care and to the reduction of inequalities. Health professionals, particularly in Primary Health Care settings, educational environments, and workplaces, play a central role in the early identification of signs of distress, health education, the creation of healthier environments, and the strengthening of self-care strategies.

Moreover, it is crucial to recognize that caring for mental health also entails caring for those who provide care. Health professionals routinely experience high emotional demands, exposure to human suffering, and often adverse working conditions. Promoting awareness of mental health care necessarily involves valuing health workers, creating institutional spaces for listening and dialogue, encouraging collective care practices, and recognizing mental health as an inseparable component of occupational health.¹

In light of these challenges, this editorial serves as both a call to reflection and to action. Raising awareness of mental health care is neither an isolated task nor one restricted to specialists; rather, it is a shared responsibility among all professionals and institutions engaged in health care. It requires the revision of practices, openness to dialogue, commitment to continuing education, and, above all, the willingness to sustain ethical, humane, and non-stigmatizing care.

May health professionals and institutions continue to reaffirm their historic role in the defense of life, comprehensive care, and mental health as a fundamental right. May we collectively change perspectives, break silences, and build practices that recognize suffering without reducing individuals to it, strengthening potentials and promoting feasible pathways for care, prevention, and hope.

Highlights

1. Mental Health as a Collective Commitment
2. Mental health care must be grounded in skilled listening, therapeutic alliance, embracement, and respect for individual life paths.
3. Caring for mental health also entails caring for those who provide care.

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