

WORLD HEALTH  
ORGANIZATION

Regional Office  
for the Eastern Mediterranean



ORGANISATION MONDIALE  
DE LA SANTÉ

Bureau régional  
pour la Méditerranée orientale

COORDINATING MENTAL HEALTH  
GROUP MEETING

EM/CO.MH.GM/4

Alexandria, 22 - 25 November 1978

The Development of the Mental Programme in Iraq

by

Dr Sabah Sadek Ahmed \*

---

\* Dr Sabah Sadek Ahmed  
Consultant  
Shemma'iah Hospital  
Baghdad  
IRAQ

Since the Revolution of 17 July Iraq has made progressive developments in all aspects of life. These include industrial, economic, educational and social developments.

In order to meet the demand of these developments the health services in Iraq show rapid development both in quantities and qualities of the service.

The mental health service as part of the health services in general has achieved considerable changes.

In order to realize the size of the development, I would like to give an idea of the mental health service before and after 1968.

Before 1968 the mental health service centralised in big cities. These included Baghdad, Mosul and Basrah only.

In Baghdad, there was only one large mental hospital (Shemma'iah Hospital). It was over-crowded with 2 000 patients. There were acute and chronic patients and one ward for mentally ill offenders. The number of psychiatrists in the hospital were only three.

There was an outpatient department in the Republic General Hospital in Baghdad where there were only two psychiatrists with a huge number of patients.

In Baghdad Medical School there were only two psychiatrists and a few beds for mentally ill patients within the neurology department.

In Basrah, there was only a small unit within the General Hospital with only one qualified psychiatrist.

In Mosul, there was a psychiatric unit within the General Hospital with outpatient and inpatient facilities with two qualified psychiatrists working in this unit.

These are all that we had before 1968 for psychiatric care. To compare this with what we have now in 1978.

First of all the number of psychiatrists in Iraq increased only from 13 psychiatrists in 1968 to 63 psychiatrists in 1978.

The EEG Department will be opened within the Alcoholic Centre.

Another new modern psychiatric unit within the grounds of Al Yarmouk General Hospital was opened with 72 beds for acute mentally ill patients run by three qualified psychiatrists, and there is an outpatient clinic as well, attached to the unit.

Al Yarmouk Hospital is now a teaching hospital for Al Mustansiriyah Medical School and this psychiatric unit is now a teaching one for this Medical School.

The Psychological Health Department was opened, it acts as an organizing body for the mental health services. In Iraq, an outpatient clinic was opened and attached to this Department, it acts as a centre for epileptic and mentally retarded patients as well as an outpatient clinic for mentally ill patients. Another EEG Unit was opened in the same department.

Training courses for junior doctors and social workers were arranged in this department by participation of other psychiatric units in Baghdad.

The psychiatric outpatient department in the Republic General Hospital in Baghdad has a lot of changes both in building and number of staff working in it. There are three psychiatrists working in this unit, it has an ECT facility on an outpatient basis. A child psychiatric clinic was opened as well.

The Psychiatric Department of Baghdad Medical City acts as a teaching unit for Baghdad Medical School. It has changed a lot in the last few years. An EEG unit was opened, and the number of psychiatrists working in this department increased only from two to six, but still the number of beds are limited and they admit the patients for teaching purposes.

In Mosul, the number of psychiatrists increased only from two to five, nursing staff and auxiliary personnel increased as well.

In Basrah, the number of psychiatrists increased from two to three and the psychiatric unit became a teaching centre for the Basrah Medical School. This includes psychiatrists working in private practice, only 35 of them are qualified psychiatrists and 28 of them are only trained psychiatrists.

In Baghdad, the main psychiatric hospital (Shamma'iah Hospital) has developed considerably. The number of patients reduced from 2 000 in 1968 to 1 200 in 1978, but the number of mentally ill offenders is still the same (300 patients).

The policy of admission to the hospital was changed. The number of the informal patients increased. Recommendation from a psychiatrist is enough for admission and not necessarily to get the permission from the court.

A rehabilitation programme introduced to the hospital especially for chronically ill patients. This includes occupational and industrial therapy.

In spite of reduction in the number of the patients the number of psychiatrists increased only from three to six, the number of junior doctors increased as well. A new building for the nursing school will open in the near future on the grounds of the hospital.

An outpatient clinic has been opened in the hospital for follow-up of the patients and treating new cases; another outpatient clinic in Althawra Hospital, which covers one of the most crowded areas in Baghdad, was opened and is run by psychiatrists in Shamma'iah Hospital.

A new hospital with a modern building and 50 beds for acute mentally ill patients was opened. This hospital is a continuation of the Dar El Rashid Hospital, it is a small private psychiatric hospital taken over by the Ministry of Health. In order to develop the service to the best, the building was changed to a new one. The number of staff increased and the number of psychiatrists increased from one to three.

An outpatient department was opened for adult psychiatric cases; also a child psychiatric department run by a child psychiatrist and a social worker.

A new building attached to the Ibn Rushid Hospital with 36 beds will open in the near future. It acts as an alcoholic and drug dependence unit for treatment of these cases, as well as a research centre for alcoholism and drug dependency in Iraq.

#### Legislation and Regulation of Mental Health Management

With the development of mental health services, and specially in the last few years, our need for a special law to regulate the management of mentally ill patients, as well as the relationship between the patients and society on one hand, and the patients and the law on the other, became necessary.

On 13 December 1973, the Iraqi Society of Neurologists and Psychiatrists recommended a special law to regulate the management of mentally ill patients; this has not yet been legislated.

#### Training Programmes for Various Professionals and Auxiliary Personnel

As I said before, great concern was given to the psychiatric training and its importance to the development of mental health care, this includes training of medical students, nurse students, junior doctors and general practitioners as well as other auxiliary personnel.

For fifth-year medical students and students in nursing college, they have their psychiatric training in the Medical City as well as Al-Shamma'iah Hospital. During this training they become familiar with most of the psychiatric cases and their management.

Only a few junior doctors have three months training in one of the psychiatric hospitals as a part of their internship.

The doctors who wish to specialize in psychiatry have to pass through one year's training in one of the mental hospitals of psychiatric units.

The Psychological Health Department arranges a one-year training course for doctors who wish to specialize in this field. During this year they receive training in outpatient and inpatient units. For the nurses, special training was opened in Al-Shamma'iah Hospital for two years, during this course we have training in general psychiatry and general medicine as well.

A new modern building will be opened in the near future on the grounds of Al-Shamma'iah Hospital for a psychiatric nursing school.

For social workers, a special training course was opened in the Psychological Department. During this course they get training in psychiatric social services. We hope to improve these courses in future and to encourage the social workers to join this field of social service.

#### Psychiatric Research

The health authorities highly appreciate the importance of psychiatric research in the development of the mental health services. With the present facilities, and due to the limited number of psychiatrists and other medical personnel working in this field, the research work is still limited and most of the studies are retrospective ones.

We hope to have more scientific research in psychiatry in the near future.

#### Strategies of Mental Health Care

A number of essential points were recommended by the Iraqi Society of Neurologists and Psychiatrists in a conference held in Baghdad on 2 and 7 November 1974 in order to develop mental health care, as well as to solve the present problems in this field. The main points for these recommendations are:

1. Geographical distribution of psychiatric care according to the demand of these services and making psychiatric services available to every citizen in Iraq.
2. Great emphasis was given to psychiatric training, both to medical students and student nurses, as well as junior doctors and general practitioners, in order to make them familiar with psychiatry.

3. Encouragement was given to the psychiatric unit, on the grounds of the General Hospital, to minimize the stigma of these illnesses and making the treatment more acceptable to the patients and their families.
4. As far as the present psychiatric hospitals are concerned with our strategy to improve these hospitals, a great effort was made in order to make Shamma'iah Hospital a typical rehabilitation centre for chronic patients in Iraq. A new building for mental ill offenders will be built in the near future on the grounds of the Shamma'iah Hospital.
5. Encouragement was given to the junior doctors in this field, scholarships were given to them after they finished their training course in order to get a degree and experience in this field. Postgraduate studies in psychiatry will open in the near future in the Baghdad Medical School.
6. Encouragement was given to the liaison between different people involved with the management of psychiatric cases in order to make our treatment more fruitful to the patients.

In Kirkuk, one of the main cities in Iraq, a new psychiatric unit was opened on the grounds of the General Hospital with inpatient and outpatient facilities. It is run by two qualified psychiatrists.

In Najaff, another psychiatric unit with outpatient facilities and ECT on an outpatient basis was opened. It is run by three psychiatrists: one of them a qualified psychiatrist. A new psychiatric hospital will be opened with 48 beds for mentally ill patients, it will act in future as a teaching unit for Kuffa Medical School which was opened this year.

Other psychiatric units with outpatient and ECT facilities were opened in most other cities in Iraq and run by trained psychiatrists.

Drugs, which were not available before, are now available in all the centres and are given free to the patients.

Now we can imagine the size of the mental health development in the last ten years, this is due to the appreciation and concern of the authorities about the importance of this part of the health service.

#### Review of Mental Health Problems

In spite of this development, we are still having some problems in the mental health service, as a part of the problems of the health service in general, and other specific problems related to the nature of these illnesses and the nature of our culture and society.

1. In spite of all efforts to encourage the people to work in this field, we still have a shortage in nursing staff and other auxiliary personnel.
2. Psychological laboratories are still not available in our psychiatric hospitals and we are in need of a clinical psychologist to do a psychometric study as well as work in the team with other medical staff.
3. In spite of the mental health care centralized in Baghdad, and in other big cities, our ambition is still to make the service available to every citizen in our country, and, as I said before, the service has started to extend beyond the centre. We need more psychiatric units with inpatient facilities within general hospitals, this will make the service more accepted by the patients and their families.
4. New problems have arisen recently; this is due to the social changes in the last few years:
  - a. Alcoholic dependency started to appear as a real problem specially in the capital and other main cities. The social changes made alcohol more acceptable by the people and easily available to them. Now the number of patients asking for treatment from alcoholic dependency has progressively increased in the last few years. In response to the Second Arab International Conference on Alcoholism and Drug Addiction, held in Baghdad from 20 to 25 November 1976, the Ministry of Health will open in the near future an Alcoholic and

Drug Addicts Centre attached to the Ibn Rushid Hospital to act as a training centre, as well as a research centre, in order to assess this problem in a more scientific way.

b. The second problem which has arisen recently is mentally retarded people, especially adult ones. The families are now unable to look after their patients due to the social changes in the last few years. The present institutions are insufficient to meet the demand in this aspect. Still, our society does not accept to put their elderly patients in institutions.

5. Due to the limited number of psychiatrists and other medical personnel working in this field, and due to the nature of our society, we are still using physical treatment only in our psychiatric hospitals, sometimes with supportive psychotherapy and social support while behavioural and psychotherapy treatment are still not practiced in our mental hospitals.