

New Frontiers

Leading the way in Psychiatric Nursing

Volume 1 Issue 3

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MALTESE ASSOCIATION OF PSYCHIATRIC NURSING



From the New General Secretary

Mary Vella

A big hello to all our readers. As you all know this is the third issue of New Frontiers. Similar to the past two issues, we present to you a newsletter brimming with news and enlightening articles reporting on various activities organized and hosted by our association.

As you may have noticed there has been a few changes on the committee and the editorial board. It was with deep regrets that MAPN accepted the resignation of Ms. Charmaine Borg as secretary. Ms. Borg is currently pursuing further studies abroad therefore it would have been physically impossible for her to carry out her role effectively. Whilst we wish her the best of luck in her studies, we would also like to offer her our support and encouragement. Be confident and know that you can do it. Good luck and a big thank you from all of us for a job well done.

The second disappointing resignation that MAPN had to face was from the editor of New Frontiers, Ms. Carmen Galea, who unfortunately had to resign for personal reasons. Whilst we have to be understanding and empathic, we were all reluctant to let her go. A big heartfelt thank you and good luck for the future from all of us for your dedication. You did a great job.

Feedback from the HORATIO board meeting

Beer Oomen— HORATIO General Secretary

MAPN impressed all at HORATIO, especially with regard to their evidenced rapid growth and all the hard work they are putting in with organising and hosting the upcoming HORATIO festival, and for their great hospitality during the recent board meeting in November 2007.

Looking at MAPN, which has come from such recent beginnings, and with such a limited number of persons as members, they have proved that taking the huge responsibility of organising the upcoming festival is just a prelude to a brighter future for mental health services in Europe's HORATIO member countries. From the beginning, we have had great trust in MAPN, and having been a guest in Malta, whilst being looked after by MAPN, we look with great respect at the work you have carried out and the effort you contribute, and look forward to visiting your nation again.

And now for some introductions. It is a great pleasure for MAPN to welcome on board the new editorial team namely Mr. Damian Gouder, Ms. Marlene Gouder, Mr. Angelo Abela and Ms. Mary Vella. As you can all see from this issue they have proven to be a real asset to the association. We are all pleased with your delivery and can only say keep it up!

Another new member on the team is myself. Some of you already know me but for those who don't my name is Mary Vella. I am an RMN and work at the Male Secure Unit at Mount Carmel Hospital. It is with great pleasure that I have taken on the role of secretary for the association. I promise everyone to do my utmost and carry out my duties to the best of my ability.

There has been enough said for now and it is time for the readers to enjoy reading all that we have prepared. The MAPN has been very busy with various activities and all the interesting reports can be found inside this issue.

As we are convinced that the festival will be great success, we sincerely hope that it will also set a good precedent for the future success of MAPN and show to the Maltese, that mental health nursing is a profession to be proud of and worth the serious attention it deserves.

As secretary of Horatio, my attention is towards the immediate future, however my vision is towards the next ten years. I believe that the approaching HORATIO festival deserves full media attention and with its active members emphasized because it is they who are the foundation of Europe's future mental health services and where the future of mental health services lie. The hard work that they carry out will be reflected in the well being of HORATIOs member countries' citizens.



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Report of the CBT workshops

Hector Cutajar MD - SHO Psychiatry

I had booked for the course a month before and was quite eager to attend despite stiff competition from two other seminars being held in the same weekend, one even in the same hotel!

I was asked by Mr Kevin Gafa' to be the official MAP-N rapporteur for the 2 day workshop event, so here goes.....

Cognitive behavioural therapy thanks to Aaron T Beck originated in 1959 soon after Rational Emotive Therapy, pioneered by Albert Ellis in 1955.

The concept of CBT lies in the fact that there are certain ingrained negatively skewed beliefs held by the patient about oneself that are intrinsically the objective root of the problem. Thus it is not the event in itself that is so traumatic, but it is the cognitive distortion which the patient upholds as a result of said event.

Rationale

The traumatic event elicits intrinsic emotions which are not amenable to change per se. The therapy focuses on addressing the resultant behaviours which the patient expresses as a result of the way he interprets such emotions. The emotions may not be made to change but the cognitive error which the pt dwells upon can be pinpointed and targeted with good effect.

The negative thinking or cognitive errors are the ultimate targets of the therapist who plays a very active role in revealing the nature of such thoughts to the client.

Beck's Cognitive Triad

In some personality types and in mental illness there are:

- errors in the perception of risk,
- logical errors
- errors in the processing of information (i.e. cognitive distortions).

These distortions relate to self, world, and future (Beck's cognitive triad). The model is: events → faulty cognitive appraisal → emotional response → maladaptive behaviour → (behaviours/emotions) = pathology.

Cognitive Errors

Cognitive errors affect mood and lead to maladaptive behaviour. These errors originate in childhood learning, internalised family/cultural attitude, and early traumatic experiences. These lead to concrete *core beliefs* which go beyond the Preconscious, ultimately leading to negative automatic thoughts, which through application of *dysfunctional assumptions* take their roots in the various schemas.

Automatic thoughts can be perpetuated by never being challenged consciously or by novel experience.

Schemas are a person's 'rules' for behaving, based on fundamental beliefs and shaped by previous (and current) experiences.

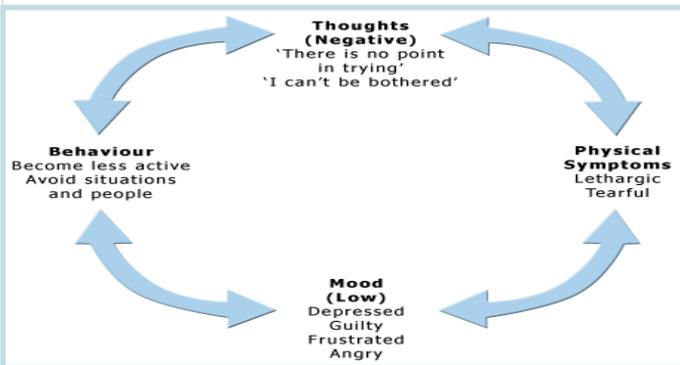
Automatic thoughts

- | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Selective abstraction | Personalisation |
| Arbitrary inference | Catastrophic thinking |
| All or nothing thinking | Overgeneralisation |
| Magnification/minimisation | |

Fundamental beliefs (in schema)

Four classes of schemas are:
Worthlessness, failure, unlovable, bad

Some examples of schema beliefs are: "I'm unlovable," "I'm a failure," "People don't care about me," "I'm not important" "People will leave me," "I will never get my needs met," "I will never be good enough," and so on. Schemas are perpetuated behaviourally through the coping styles of schema maintenance, schema avoidance, and schema compensation.



Maladaptive Behaviour

Behavioural change → thoughts → emotions → physiological changes → behaviour

Techniques

Behavioural techniques

- Activity scheduling;
- Graded assignments;
- Exposure;
- Response prevention;
- Distraction;
- Relaxation training;
- Assertiveness/social skills training.

Cognitive techniques

- Psycho education, including reading assignments
- Identifying automatic thoughts
- Socratic questioning
- Role play
- Thoughts diary

- Examining the evidence
- Working through the options
- Thought rehearsal

The seminar was pleasantly interactive and I must say that Mr Dodd succeeded in keeping the audience interested, attentive and actively involved as well. The hotel services were most satisfactory and might I say, the food was enjoyable too.

Regards to all readers

References

Oxford Handbook of Psychiatry, D Semple, R Smyth, J Burns, R Darjee, A McIntosh, Oxford University Press 1st ed. 2005



The MAPN Blog

Angelo Abela — PRO

When MAPN was set up we understood the importance of having a website to act as reference for members as well as other institutions and organizations. The idea of setting up a blog came about as a by product of the need to have an online presence until we had the proper resources to get the official website up and running. Since then the blog has evolved from just being a makeshift homepage. It now serves as a useful reference not just for psychiatric and general nurses, but also for any health care professional involved in mental health care and psychiatry. The blog has three main purposes:

- Providing information regarding seminars, meetings and other events - I believe that having all this information in one place is extremely important since many times us professionals fail to attend some venues not through lack of interest but rather because we are not aware of such activities until it is too late. Nowadays some organizers inform us themselves of activities they have in store and we hope this will be increasingly the case as the blog gains more popularity.
- Sharing relevant information with others – How many times have we read an article or a research study which we feel is so relevant to us that we want to share it with everyone else? The blog is one way of doing this. It also serves in keeping everyone informed about news

articles so as to generate discussion or create awareness.

- Reflecting about our practice – While the process of reflection is usually something we do privately we often come across insights which would be beneficial to others going through our same situation. The blog can serve as a way of sharing these ideas and thoughts with others. Sadly the blog has rarely been used for this purpose and I genuinely believe this is a missed opportunity, especially since others can post feedback on our thoughts through the blog, thus generating some healthy discussion.

The blog is something that exists to provide a service but it is also dependant on reader's contributions. It is of utmost importance that readers share information with us so that we can make it available to others. Do you know of an activity which might interest your colleagues? Read an article in the newspaper which you think might generate discussion? Came across a news/research article which could be useful to health care professionals working in a psychiatric setting? Written a reflective article which you want to discuss with others? With over 20 visitors a week it seems that many people are taking interest in the blog but I would like to see more people contributing either by posting or leaving comments on existing posts. You will find instructions on how to do so by visiting the blog on mapnurses.blogspot.com.

Yearly Financial Overview (Oct06 - Sep07)

Antonio Magro Treasurer



Hi all, this is my first report as a treasurer of the Maltese Association of Psychiatric Nurses. We started the year with a lot of financial difficulties but through perseverance and hard work we managed to finish the year with a plus. The association organised the following events through out the past year, which left us with a considerable profit.

The first event was held in November 2006. This was organised together with the Mental Health Association and consisted of a film entitled "Out of the Shadow". This proved to be a success and gave us the encouragement to organise more similar occasions. Next in line was the half day seminar entitled "Psychiatric Nursing – The Change Agent in Mental Health". This seminar was held at Attard in January 2007. This was also successful. In April MAP-N celebrated its first anniversary, and on this

occasion an evening of entertainment was organised. All this would not have been possible without the help of our sponsors. Therefore I would like to thank our main sponsor Estetica, together with Philips, and BestPrint for their contributions and support.

Whilst the above, resulted in financial gain, our main income remains the membership fees. I would like to take this opportunity to remind all our members to seek out our council members and renew their membership. Just remember that "Lots of drops make up an OCEAN".

A full financial report for the last year will be presented at the annual general meeting which will take place in January.

Health & Safety in the Psychiatric Setting

Angelo Abela *PRO*



On the 15th of September, MAPN, in conjunction with Mount Carmel Hospital, organized a half day seminar entitled 'Health and Safety in the Psychiatric Setting'. There was a lot of interest in the seminar with over 50 professionals attending



The Audience at the Health & Safety Seminar

Various speakers tackled the issue of health and safety from different aspects of psychiatric care. Marcia Gafa, psychiatric nurse, discussed her dissertation on nursing staff's experiences of being a subject of violence in acute psychiatric settings. She described how literature regarding the issue points towards the importance of training staff in dealing with aggression as well as providing adequate support to those who experience violence. She commented that both training and support are currently lacking and that amendments should be made in this regard. Dr. Mark Xuereb carried out a session, with the title 'Will You C.A.R.A. Your Patient?', during which he introduced the Child and Adult Risk Assessment tool. He said that there is an important need to have formal assessment and that we should not have to photocopy what other countries are doing but rather have a tool which is

adapted to the local needs. Dr. Xuereb explained how there can never be zero risk and that tools should support, rather than replace, professional judgment. He finished his session by handing out a CARA assessment sheet to those present. In an intervention he made after this session, Dr. J. Saliba reiterated the importance of not relying exclusively on risk assessment tools. He also discussed the need of validating the tool before introducing it to the clinical environment.

Paul Pace, infection control nurse, discussed the importance of infection control. He noted that psychiatric hospitals are not immune to infections. Mr. Pace discussed the most common types of infections which professionals can come across within MCH and stressed the importance of using the tools at our disposal - such as gowns, masks and gloves – and using them properly. He also mentioned other dangers that the nurse can come in contact with such as increased anxiety levels, back injury, violence and allergic reactions. Simon Borg, occupational health and safety officer with MUMN, carried out the last session with a special focus on mental health care. He said that injury is very common in a mental health/ learning disability setting and ranks in 6th place according to the National Statistics Office. He said that, by law, the environment should be assessed for risks by competent individuals. He explained that this process usually involves a group of people who possess different areas of knowledge.

At the end of the seminar Dr. Paul Micallef conducted a workshop. Some recommendations which could be identified were: the importance of having a vision to work towards and the need for proper staff training and support. It was also mentioned that in order to improve the service given, proper evaluation is required following an incident. Finally Dr. Micallef suggested repeating this seminar for those who could not attend.

From Harry Dodd

Cognitive Behavioural Psychotherapist

Hello to the MAP-N organisers for the CBT Introductory Course held on 26/27 October 2007 and to all I know in Malta. First of all a big thanks to all who attended the 2 days of training and the excited, generous participation and effort that was offered by all those delegates.

The intention was to introduce CBT into nursing practice, in reality the delegates were multi professional all eager to absorb what they could from a very packed programme to allow skill development during the course of the seminar and workshop. The short time I had with everyone was excellent both during the workshops and socially. The Maltese definitely know how to make visitors feel welcome and part of their community.

The eagerness of the Maltese professionals in mental health to learn was refreshing. My impression in talking to you all is the frustration you all have based on not being able to provide better and more coherent and quality services due to the system in which you are working. Despite this you all have the belief and energy to create a first class service that all of you are individually

and collectively struggling to achieve. I hope that I have offered a little knowledge for you all to take into your clinical practice.

The 2 days were on the whole well organised. I think we could have been really COGNITIVE and carried out some ratings and feedback before and after based on goals and material. I think the effort in advertising etc. was terrific, and in retrospect maybe upping the number to attend would be fruitful in the future maybe.

I wish you all well in your work and life, and hope to see some or even all of you again; thank you again for the great time. Ciao, Ciao, bye, bye.



Interview: Dr. Michael Schultz

Clinic of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy Bethel, Evangelisches Krankenhaus Bielefeld

What made you become a psychiatric nurse?

A:- My father is a psychiatrist, I went into research and achieved a doctorate in Health Science but I was more impressed by the nurses taking care of the patients and decided to go for a caring rather than a curing profession.

What have been the highlights of your career to date?

A:- The feeling that you can change things, contact with other nurses from different countries, initial contact and the stories that link you to the patients, the realization of how fragile the mind is and now looking forward to the Horatio festival next year.

What kind of job satisfaction do you get from being a psychiatric nurse?

A:- Good arguments in finding new and better ways in caring for patients. The respect you get when the patients are taken seriously.

What qualities do you feel a person needs in order to pursue such a career?

A:- Critical thinking and personal communication skills, less interventions but more time to be with the patients. Psychiatric nurses need implicit and explicit knowledge therefore there should be lots of possibilities to improve and be able to develop. Although some see it as a job, they need to be able to take decisions based on evidence.

Could you give some examples as to the challenges that psychiatric nurses are facing in your country?

A:-One problem is shortage of staff therefore care is largely based in hospital settings whilst there is no community care. We need a change in education to make it university based and provide counseling with the relatives in their own environment. Another problem is demographic since a good number of older people suffer from dementia. We are now hoping for some changes through European influence.

What are your impressions of the local psychiatric nursing care?

A:- The hospital setting being out of built up areas is good. There

are different types of nurses who are proud of their profession and they have lots of drive to be able to work twelve hour shifts.

Do you have any suggestions to enhance psychiatric nursing care in Malta?

Maybe working six days a week but with shorter shifts would give them more time for building up relationships with patients.

If you had the chance to start again, would you still choose the same profession?

A:-Yes I would because although I would have liked to become a rock star, I have found psychiatric nursing to be enjoyable and creative. You live by looking forward but understanding backwards.

What are your plans for the future?

A:-The Horatio festival. Setting up a BSc course in Mental Health in Germany. Come back to work with Martin Ward. Write a book on Adherence Therapy.



Dr. Micheal Shultz is a Psychiatric Nurse with a Doctorate in Nursing and Health Sciences. Since 2001 Dr. Schultz works in the clinic for Psychiatry and Psychotherapy in Bethel Bielefeld. He is responsible of the unit for quality and research in Psychiatric Nursing.

HORATIO: EUROPEAN FESTIVAL OF PSYCHIATRIC NURSING THE AGE OF DIALOGUE

Wed 5th - Sun 9th Nov 08
Corinthia San Gorg Hotel,
St George's Bay,
Malta



The theme of this unique event is the dialogue that takes place between psychiatric nurses, in their own clinical areas, across cities and towns, national and international borders. The aim is to share their experiences, helping each other to develop their understanding of their work and supporting each other in their professional endeavors. The Scientific Committee of the Horatio European Expert Panel invites abstract submissions from all psychiatric nurses and/or related health disciplines who are interested in sharing their experiences, skill & knowledge with a large audience of their peers from around the world. Please visit www.horatio-web.eu for more details

Jum dinji ta' s-saħħa mentali fl-Isptar Monte Karmeli

Andrew Sciberras - Staff Nurse (MAW) / Artist

Fil-jum dinji li jikkomemora s-saħħa mentali, ġewwa l-Isptar Monte Karmeli għet imtella' wirja ta' l-arti. Fiha pparteċipaw kemm staff kif ukoll dawk li jagħmlu użu mill-facilitajiet ta' l-isptar. Għas-serata tal-ftuħ attendew persuni distinti.

Hi liema hi s-sura li tingħata, l-arti hi dejjem l-espressjoni ta' tiġrib ġewwieni mgħoddi mill-għarbiel tas-sensibbiltà, ta' dik il-hila li għandha r-ruħ tal-bniedem li toħloq mezz komunikattiv. F'dan is-sens, kull espressjoni artistika hi wkoll minnha nnifisha komunikazzjoni, imqar bejn l-artist u l-memorja tiegħu. B'mod naturali kull artist, għalhekk, jitlaq mit-tradizzjoni li jkun trabba fiha (nazzjonali, reġjunali, internazzjonali, ta' epoka jew oħra) u fi hdanha jfittex l-għamliet li jxirqu l-aktar lill-messaġġ tiegħu. Il-personalità tiegħu tinsab fil-forma li hu jagħti lill-kontenut.

Edward Borg iwassal l-espressjoni artistika tiegħu bil-fotografija. Huwa ispirat mill-pajsaġġ ta' l-hinn minn xtutna fejn jieħu l-immaginazzjoni ta' dak li qed josservah 'il bogħod mill-esperjenzi mundani. It-teknika hija ta' pajsaġġ statiku fejn Borg jilgħab ħafna bir-riflessjonijiet ta' l-ilma u l-kuntrasti tal-kuluri. Il-kompożizzjoni artistika tiegħu toħloq illużjoni ta' profondità.

Dr. Saliba wkoll iwassal l-espressjoni artistika tiegħu permezz tal-fotografija. Hemm proċess ta' studju fejn tidhol il-kompożizzjoni ta' l-espressjoni artistika tiegħu. Il-pajsaġġ ta' Saliba huwa mimli emozzjoni profonda, li l-kultura orjentali tkompli tagħmlu enigmatiku. Il-kapaċità tiegħu hi, li minn dettall ta' kuljum, li ħafna drabi minħabba l-ħajja mgħaġġla li qed ngħixu fiha lanqas biss nintebħu bih, kapaċi jonqox b'mod artistiku, li trid jew ma tridx iħalli mpatt fuqek. Fil-kwadretti eżistenzjalisti emotivi li joħloq Saliba donnu l-hin jieqaf u kollox jinsab trankwill.

Carmelo Micallef ilu jesebixxi x-xogħol tiegħu għal bosta snin fix-xena lokali. Fl-esebizzjoni ta' din is-sena tagħna set ta' pitturi li fihom segwenzja kronoloġika. Huwa ispirat mill-ġrajja Biblika ta' Noè li minnha jrid iwassal messaġġ evoluttiv kif ukoll etiku. Il-

pajsaġġ Malti għall-artist huwa sors ta' ispirazzjoni, fejn tagħna pitturi li fihom jidher ċar li t-teknika u l-kulur huma mħaddma ferm tajjeb.

Żewġ pitturi li jagħmlu mpatt immedjat fuqek hekk kif tarahom huma 'Bjuda' u 'In-nanna Kolina'. Dawn ix-xogħlijiet huma tal-pittrici żagħżuġha Marlene Gouder. Jekk Marlene tkompli fuq dawn il-binarij jien fi żgur li għad tagħtina xogħol artistiku ta' livell għoli. Hemm dinamizmu kbir f'dawn iż-żewġ pitturi fejn il-kulur, it-tematika u l-emozzjoni jitwahaħdu f'ħaġa waħda li ma tistax ma tassorbihomx b'mod l-aktar naturali fil-ġewwieni tiegħek.

L-arti ta' Giovanni Farrugia turi vibrazzjoni kontinwa. Wiehed, għalhekk malajr jifhem li l-ispirazzjoni tiegħu ġejja primarjament min-natura umana u dik ta' l-annimali u dak kollu li jdawwarhom. Isawwar l-arti tiegħu minn materjal magħmul mill-bniedem bħall-ħadid u l-azzar, waqt li jaħrab kemm jista' jkun 'medium' naturali bħall-ġebel u l-injam.

Ix-xogħol fiż-żejt ta' Glenville Galea jassorbi d-dettall spiritwali ta' dak kollu li hu Malti, jigifieri l-folklor, il-villaġġi, il-pjanuri u s-siti tal-qedem. Personalment, lili jolqotni ħafna x-xogħol 'black and white', forsi għax iġedded fiha ċerta nostalgija.

Ma tistax ma tintebaħx li l-aktar li jispira lil Andrew Sciberras kemm fid-disinji bl-'indian ink' kif ukoll fit-tematika tal-poeziji huwa l-eżistenzjalizmu. Andrew Sciberras ippublika żewġ kotba ta' poeziji u disinji, 'Samsara' u 'Noti tad-demmi', u bi ħsiebu johrog ktieb ġdid fil-bidu tas-sena d-dieħla.

Charmaine Xuereb għandha xogħol li jvarja minn stil 'life' sa semi astratt. L-arti li tipproduċi tirrifletti l-qagħda tal-kuxjenza tagħha.

Caruana tagħna replika ta' San Ġlomu xogħol tal-Caravaggio li jinsab fil-Kon-Katidral ta' San Ġwann fil-Belt Valletta. Laqatni wkoll xogħol interessanti bil-lapes ta' Marville.

Works by Clients of Mount Carmel Hospital for the World Mental Health Day 2007



Of Events, Goodbyes and Welcomes

Kevin Gafa - President



The past two months for MAPN were the most hectic yet exciting so far. Our commitment towards nurses working in mental health settings pushed us to organise the Health and Safety in the Psychiatric Setting; half day symposium in September. The general feedback gathered from this event was that the issue of health and safety should be seriously addressed by authorities with onsite planning and strategies.

When I first contacted Mr. Harry Dodd back in January 2007 and asked him about an introductory course in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy I was impressed by the immediate commitment of Mr. Dodd. Together with the Director of Nursing Services, Mr. Jesmond Sharples, we set a realistic target of organising a two day workshop event rather than a course so that the audience could participate actively in group work and role play. The outcome of the CBT event was excellent. There was no time to relax, and within the same week we hosted the HORATIO board meeting. This was a tremendous experience for all of us. We were actively involved in discussions related to the biggest association representing the 350,000 psychiatric nurses around Europe. Most of the discussions were focused on the HORATIO festival between 5th and 9th November 2008. The countdown for this event has officially started now with the first call of abstracts launched.

Charmaine Borg was the back bone of our association. Together with the other members of the board we formed a team which was seen as

successful to many and even threatening to others. If I had to select one memorable moment in MAPN's history so far, I would surely choose the 11th of May 2006 when Charmaine, nearly cracking with anxiety, launched the association. She stepped down from the role of Secretary to further enrich her studies abroad. Her experience at King's College will one day in the future reconfirm her as an important asset for MAPN. Charmaine, myself and the rest of the committee had a difficult task to find the right substitute for the outgoing secretary. According to the statute, the opportunity was given to all eligible candidates to contest the vacant post. Mary Vella was elected and from the first meeting we had, she proved to be enthusiastic and committed enough for the MAPN cause.

In November and December we have up to hundred members who have to renew their membership with MAPN. I take this opportunity to emphasise once again that the only financial resource for MAPN comes from the members. With your small yearly contribution you can be an active part in all this.

This is also the last issue of New Frontiers for 2007 the first one with an editorial team. In the name of MAPN and the editorial team, I wish all of you the best of health and happiness for 2008... the year of the festival.

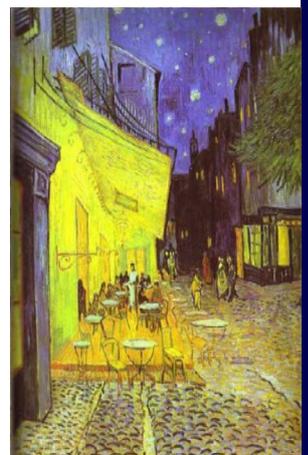
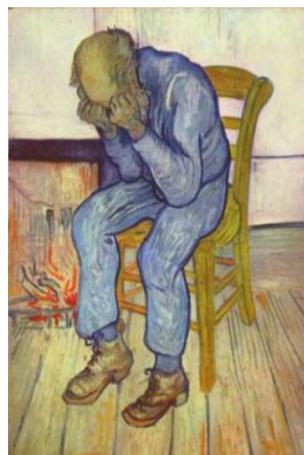
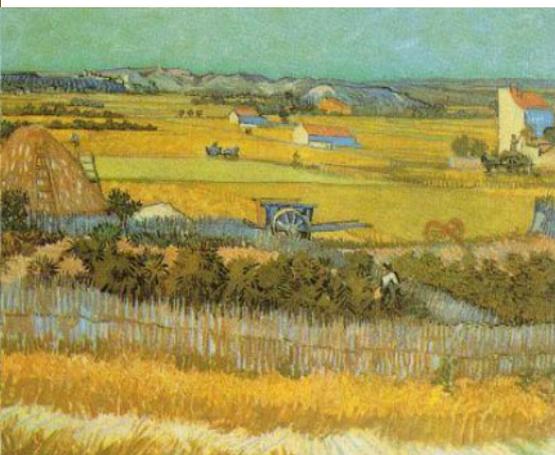
In the next issue of New Frontiers: Vincent van Gogh



In his last published letter in July 1890 Vincent van Gogh wrote to his brother Theo:

'I set to work again— though the brush almost slipped from my fingers... I have since painted three big more canvases. They are vast stretches of corn under troubled skies, and I did not need to go out of my way to try to express sadness and the extremity of loneliness. I hope you will see them soon— since I almost think that these canvasses will tell you what I cannot tell you in words...'

This great artist's experience of pain as experienced through his mental suffering, in contrast with his vibrant works which portray his, genius, intense emotions and love for life, will be discussed in the next issue of New Frontiers, in April 2008.





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Mental Health Day

Mary Vella Secretary



As you all know Mental Health Day is celebrated worldwide on the 10th October. Each year the Federation for Mental Health chooses a different theme for this occasion. This year the chosen theme was 'Mental Health in a Changing World - The impact of Culture and Diversity'.

The world seems to be getting smaller as people travel to and settle in countries other than their homeland. There are approximately 6.5 billion people living on earth. Within that number, there are more people living outside their country of origin than at any other time in history. One person out of 35 is an international migrant and that amounts to 3% of the global population.

Individuals have moved from place to place throughout history for many different reasons, but whatever these reasons may be some degree of stress is always involved. Migration means breaking away from family, friends, established social networks and traditional routines. It also entails having to adapt to a new way of life in a totally different and strange environment facing an uncertain future. Migration is nowadays a global issue therefore many different cultures can now be found cultivated on the same soil. So it is especially important to adopt an integrative approach to mental health when working with people of diverse cultural

backgrounds.

Culture may influence many aspects of mental health, including how individuals from a given culture communicate and manifest their symptoms, their style of coping, family and community supports and their willingness to seek treatment. People are probably more tied to their cultural and ethnic beliefs when they are ill than when feeling well. Being in hospital can be a difficult and frightening experience at the best of times but especially more so when it involves cultural differences. At this stage people are at their most vulnerable so it is crucial for caregivers to be culturally sensitive. This requires flexibility and respect for other points of view and an understanding of culturally influenced health behaviours. If mental health nurses possess the ability to understand these behaviours, the delivery of care would be greatly enhanced.

Let us all keep this theme in our minds when caring for our patients. Or else how can we move forward and give the best care possible if we don't take into consideration the differences of those that we are trying to help? Understanding and tolerance of all cultures and lifestyles is crucial in the delivery of competent care. The focus should remain on the patient as an individual not a stereotype, a human being and not merely another case.

Events 2008

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