



Press Release: World Mental Health Day 2017: “My Mental Health First”

18 October 2017, GAZA – The World Health Organization (WHO), the European Union (EU) and the Ministry of Health (MoH) celebrated World Mental Health today in Gaza. The celebration had the theme “My Mental Health First”. This is part of the ongoing project “Building Palestinian resilience: improving psychosocial and mental health responses to emergency situations”, which is funded by the EU. This Project addresses important gaps in the development of mental health services in Palestine, particularly in relation to the mental health emergency response in the Gaza Strip.

The day started with a football match between the team of Al-Rantisi pediatric hospital and Shuhada al-Aqsa Hospital. The two teams won the two days’ football tournament among MoH staff that took place earlier this week. The team of Shuhada Al-Aqsa Hospital won the game. The football match was followed by a bazaar that presented handmade crafts made by mental health service users at Gaza Psychiatric Hospital Day Care.

In his opening speech, Dr Yousef Abu Elreish, MoH representative, said “The goal of winning keeps the two teams going restlessly till the end of the game. And our goal at the Ministry of Health is to provide holistic mental health care to all Palestinians who are in need, and this goal will keep us going until we achieve it”.

The project will seek to mitigate the accumulated psychosocial consequence of the last three crises in Gaza, to build population’s resilience to withstand such crises and to continue personal and professional lives, and to increase key health institutions’ ability to respond to the mental health needs

Explaining more on the project, Dr Gerald Rockenschaub, WHO head of office in oPt, stated “Mental health problems are extremely common and will affect up to 400,000 women, children and men in Gaza. Furthermore people with long term medical conditions (such as heart disease or diabetes) will have much worse outcomes if they also suffer from depression. In Gaza and WB, around 30% of people with long term medical conditions attending PHC facilities also suffer from common mental health problems. Another recent study has shown that 30% of Palestinian women suffered from depression after the birth of their babies. This can have serious effects for both the mother and child”. In addition, he said that the WHO is extremely grateful to the EU who has been supporting the mental health of Palestinians since 2007.

The event celebrated the World Mental Health Day, which is observed in October every year, with the overall objective of raising awareness of mental health issues and mobilizing efforts in support of better mental health. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that following Gaza conflict 2014 and the ongoing Israeli blockade, about 20% of the population of Gaza suffer

from mental health problems and need short- to long-term support to recover. In addition, one third of people attending Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) Primary Health Care (PHC) centers in Gaza and the West Bank have suffered from common mental health problems. Despite this high need and demand for mental health services, there is still a huge gap between the mental health needs of the Palestinian population and the provision of mental health services and psycho-social interventions. The present EU funded project will significantly build the capacity of the mental health services in both Ministry of Health and UNRWA health facilities.

For further information, please contact:

Mohammad Yaghi

WHO, Gaza office

Tel: 00972-598-944649

email: yaghim@who.int