



*Utviklingsminister Dag-Inge Ulsteins  
innlegg ved oppstart av kurset «Global  
Mental Helse» @ 17. august 2020*

Dear all,

First of all: congratulations on opening this course on global mental health, the first full course of its kind in Norway.

Also congratulations to Ragnhild Dybdahl on your post as associate professor of global mental health.

I am delighted that also Nepalese students from the Tribhuvan University have been invited to sign up for this course, a special greeting to them.

Dear students and faculty,

For decades now – global health has been a central tool in our development strategy – in our efforts to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030.

It has worked: It has saved millions of lives – and enabled people to work.

But vital aspects of good health have been largely neglected in this work: One of them is mental health.

Mental illness is not a personal failure. If there is failure, it is in the way we have responded to people with mental and neurological disorders.

The global toll of mental illness and neurological disorders is staggering. It is estimated that 10% of the world's population, including 20% of children and adolescents, suffer from some sort of mental disorder. When people are unable to go to school or work, or to participate fully in society, mental disorders become a significant economic burden.

Because people do not get the care they need. Mental and neurological disorders impose a range of costs on individuals, households, employers, and society as a whole, ranging from the cost of care to the cost of lost productivity. This affects both the rich and the poor alike.

People cannot participate fully in society.

A great deal of this suffering is unnecessary.

This is about to change.

I believe – strongly – that investing in the psychological capital of a people is – not only the right thing to do – but also one of the most effective keys to promoting development and well-being.

Slowly, long-held prejudices are dispelled, and we are seeing the beginning of a new era in the field of mental health care.

Now more people than ever know that physical and mental health are inextricably linked to each other and to the well-being of individuals.

Improving mental health requires comprehensive action - within the health sector – as well as outside it. Mental health is nurtured at home, in schools, in social settings and in the workplace.

In Norway, the government has decided that mental health should be an equal part of public health work, included in the same way as somatic health. Thus, in Norway, mental public health is a prioritized area in all our strategies and plans.

As professionals of the future, your knowledge and skills will be vital on promoting mental health, - locally and globally!

Last year, Norway became the first country to launch a strategy for combating non-communicable diseases as a part of our development policy – and action on mental health is a priority.

It is an exciting time for us as we move towards operationalizing the strategy. These days the world is fighting COVID-19, which is a communicable disease. However, there are strong links to the non-communicable diseases, since people living with NCDs such as cardio-vascular diseases, diabetes and cancer are at high risk for getting sick and die from COVID-19. And the measures implemented to curtail the pandemic also has unintended mental health consequences, due to isolation and fear.

The World Health Organization will be a central partner for us in implementing the NCD strategy. Dr. Tedros, the Director General of the WHO, and Guterres, the Secretary General of the UN, have both strongly addressed the importance of mental health. Both have emphasized that mental health is especially important now as the world is facing the COVID-19 pandemic.

WHO is the central coordinating international organization in global health and has remained an important partner for us, both in their work at the global level on norms and standard settings but also in their work at country level. And mental health is nurtured or diminished at country level. At this critical time in global health we must work to strengthen the organization.

You will learn during your course that the WHO is the central hub for global health diplomacy. Advocating for mental health at the global level at the WHO is important. But it is also important to bring the message across the system to other actors, including those that are dealing with human rights issues. That is why Norway spoke about the importance of mental health in the Human Rights Council last month. We emphasized the importance of ensuring that the dignity and rights of people living with mental health conditions are safeguarded and that a rights-based perspective complements the biomedical paradigm.

We need to continue to raise our voices on this important issue, since people with mental health illnesses are still being shackled, abused and mistreated in some places. You as students can play a vital role in this regard.

Our ability to eradicate extreme poverty will depend on our physical and mental health alike.

I hope that we can take advantage of this launch of the global mental health course to push the mental health field forward – together.

The knowledge and skills you acquire will be essential if we are to achieve the sustainable development goals and eradicating extreme poverty – together.

Thank you and good luck!