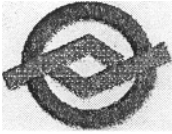


FEAFES –Mental Health and The Media



1. INCREASE SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE

Use precise concepts and terms to inform

The media must be able to represent reality well. Not to confuse or ignore the scientific and technical data about what a mental illness is. Be sure you are well documented and informed adequately before transmitting inexact or erroneous information, as in any other field (politics, economy, etc.). Contrast Institution and Medical-Scientific world news and potentiate those that come from directly affected persons (associations, families and persons with mental diseases). Use information sources that are available to you (FEAFES, etc.) so as to give precise and objective information about what is real. Call things by their name and don't simplify excessively.

2. GIVE A POSITIVE VIEW

Transmit a positive view of mental illness. Give more attention to solutions and less to limitations.

Emphasize positive facets, the potentials, achievements and advances, human qualities. Avoid over-dimensioning limitations and isolated negative cases. Show the mentally ill person in their multiple positive aspects, without over-dimensioning the fact that they suffer a mental illness, not in the negative nor positive (do not magnify) outstanding people, but rather emphasize ordinary achievements.

3. CONTEMPLATE ALL FACETS

Show people with a mental illness in an integral form.

Persons with mental illness have multiple facets, just as any other individual. Don't show persons with mental illness in a uni-dimensional form, but in all the others: with the same feelings, problems, aspirations, with the same strengths and weaknesses, with a working, family, social, sexual, creative life, etc. Mental disease is not something global, permanent or immutable it's something partial and relative. We all know someone with some type of mental illness, acute or slight.

4. FACILITATE NORMALIZING (STANDARDIZING) INFORMATION

Mental Illness must be treated as any other illness

Mental illness is just another illness. Represent people with mental illness in normal and usual situations in the community: home, work, leisure, social situations. Present mental illness naturally, as naturally as you would present flu, a trauma, or a physical disorder. Offer a natural and credible image.

5. LESS COMPASSION, MORE RESOURCES

Fight for rights and resources; do not awaken compassion

Avoid giving a piteous vision that awakes compassion. Do not show mental illness in a dramatic or sensationalist way; do not recur to gratuitous emotional aspects that may awaken feelings of paternalism, compassion, morbid curiosity, super-protection, distancing, frivolity, etc. The persons with mental illness have the same rights as any other person. What they need are resources so as to be able to fully exert these rights.

6. LET THE PROTAGONISTS TALK

Potenciate individualized and lived information that the affected persons can show as tools to create a positive image.

Proximity and direct knowledge of people helps dismantle false and negative prejudice and stereotypes, since it allows us to see the person more than the label. Persons directly affected must participate by themselves and have the opportunity to reach the media without intermediaries nor be exposed to any possibility of manipulation by third parties.

7. BRING DOWN FALSE BELIEFS, MYTHS OR PREJUDICE

Do not spread or maintain prejudice and false beliefs, neither in a subtle nor in an explicit way.

Break up with the traditional concepts of mental illness. Do not make use of old ideas, beliefs, myths, negative prejudice or stereotypes about how a person with a mental illness is. Many of the beliefs society has in general may be incorrect: mental illness is not a punishment, not a guilt about anything, persons that suffer it do not have a double personality, nor are they de-humanized and irrational individuals, they are not aggressive, etc. Ponder and document yourself before reproducing false beliefs.

8. SEPARATE MENTAL ILLNESS FROM THE CHRONIC OF EVENTS

Break the false link violence-mental illness

A violent behavior cannot be justified only by a mental illness. Persons with mental illnesses have the same probability of committing a delinquent *act* as any other. Persons with a mental illness, that undergo psychiatric treatment and that have a family and adequate social environment can and must live in society without risk to anyone. Do not prejudge nor relegate the cause of a violent or delinquent act to a mental illness because there is seldom a single cause that will explain a behavior of this sort. Do not omit relevant information to understand the fact because it can give a biased vision that foments and maintains prejudice. Act in either of two ways: (1) limit yourself to describing the directly observable facts (without adventuring a pre-judgment of a mental illness as cause of the event). Or, (2) explain the context in which the circumstances occurred and the causal factors without dismissing the illness as the single cause so as not to take on the plurality of responsibilities.

9. WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE, DO NOT LABEL

Do not stigmatize persons that suffer a mental illness with the incorrect use of words that define them.

Persons, healthy or sick, are, above all, persons. In many cases, the circumstance of the mental illness is not relevant for the information, so there is no need to even mention it. If you must refer to it, then you must avoid labeling individuals by turning their condition into a noun: "a schizophrenic", "a depressive", "an anorexic", etc. In the same way as we would talk about "a syphilitic", "a cirrhotic". Don't insist on the differences, rather on the similitude between persons. Use the appropriate language to represent mental illness. Don't use psychiatric terminology in a different context specially when this acquires a negative or pejorative meaning.

10. REMEMBER THAT THE MAJORITY OF ILLNESSES ARE INVISIBLE

Illustrate information regarding persons with mental illness with adequate graphic material.

The majority of mental illnesses are not physically perceived. The Press and TV need to illustrate their information. To this purpose they often employ inadequate photographs that show external symptoms of other more "visible" disorders. This practice powerfully contributes to maintaining the confusion that exists among the different pathologies. Everything described above must be applied as much as possible to any graphic information.