

The Take of the Commissioner for Children on
The Situation of Mental Health Care
Facilities for Children

Presentation to the
Health Committee -
Parliament of Malta
8th July, 2014

How should we assess the situation?

In terms of:

- x what facilities we have – **piecemeal** approach
- ✓ what facilities we should have – **systemic** approach

7 criteria for assessing the system of mental health care facilities for children

The system should be:

- ✓ Tailored for and exclusive to children
- ✓ Comprehensive
- ✓ Community-oriented
- ✓ Coordinated
- ✓ Accessible
- ✓ Qualitatively good
- ✓ Holistic

How **tailored for and exclusive to children** is our system of mental health care facilities for children?

- ✓ Outpatient and inpatient facilities for children only:
 - ✓ Child Guidance Clinic (CGC)
 - ✓ Young People's Unit (YPU)
 - ✓ Kids in Development (KIDs)
- X No acute mental health facility for children only
- X Children are sometimes treated in adult facilities.
- Set up an acute mental health facility within Mater Dei Hospital for children.
- YPU should always have a functional quiet room with multisensory facilities.

How **comprehensive** is our system of mental health care facilities for children?

- ✓ The available facilities cater for the full range of mental health problems suffered by children experiencing different degrees of severity of such problems.
- X The system lacks specialized facilities that cater for children with challenging behaviour but without any underlying mental ill-health.
- Set up a 3-tier stepdown facility for children who need a behavioural modification programme that is tailor made for each child with a highly intensive multi disciplinary team from the health, education and social spheres.

How **community-oriented** is our system of mental health care facilities for children?

- ✓ Community care is legally established as the primary form of care in mental health.
- ✓ KIDs is situated in the community.
- X CGC is centralised and adjacent to a geriatric hospital.
- X YPU, though detached from MCH, is not based in the community.
- Relocate YPU to a site that is in the heart of the community.
- CGC should be located in a number of health centres.
- More community services similar to those for adults

How *coordinated* is our system of mental health care facilities for children?

- ✓ CGC accepts referrals of youngsters from doctors, CDAU, *Appogé* and School Psychology Services, and works in close collaboration with all of these.
- ✓ Preventive outreach psychiatric visits to children at risk of mental health problems (Fejda/St Jeanne Antide)
- ✓ KIDs accepts referrals from *Appogé*.
- X No outreach service for children with acute mental health needs
- Crisis Intervention Team at MDH should be trained to cater for children and adolescents as well.

How *accessible* is our system of mental health care facilities for children?

- ✓ CGC operates a triage system to prioritise the most urgent cases.
- ✓ CGC follows children for as long as they need to be followed.
- X The caseload at CGC increases every year, resulting in long waiting times, even for a preliminary assessment to gauge urgency.
- X YPU is often full and unable to take more children.
- Expand the human resources within CGC.
- YPU should have a post-acute residential or semi-residential function only.

How qualitatively good is our system of mental health care facilities for children?

- ✓ Solid legal framework promoting quality of care in mental health care facilities for children
- ✓ Specific license for mental health care facility for children (Mental Health Act, Article 40 (1)(b))
- ✓ Requirement for licensed facility to draw up operational guidelines that are consistent with the Act (Mental Health Act, Article 40 (1)(c))
- ✓ Commissioner for Mental Health obliged by law to carry out yearly inspections (Mental Health Act, Article 6(j))
- ✓ Maltese National Standards for Mental Health Services include section on children and adolescents.

How qualitatively good is our system of mental health care facilities for children? (cont.)

- X No mental health care facilities for children have yet been licensed to date.
- X The licensing and regulating body (Department for Health Care Standards) is not an independent entity.
- Prioritise the licensing of mental health care facilities for children.
- Endow the Department of Health Care Standards with the legal status of an authority independent from Government control.

How **holistic** is our system of mental health care facilities for children?

- ✓ Apart from medical staff, CGC is staffed inter alia by a psychologist and a social worker.
- ✓ YPU is staffed inter alia by teachers, a psychologist, a social worker and a learning support assistant.
- Enhanced coordination between educational, health and social sectors
- Expansion of non-medical staff and more multi-disciplinary teamwork between the various professions.
- Refurbish CGC to make it more child-friendly.
- Invest in the upgrade of the educational, living and leisure facilities at YPU.

“Children need to enjoy full protection today. We have to ensure that the services provided revolve around the children’s needs and not vice versa.”

(Interim Recommendations by the Task Force regarding Minors)

Address: 16/18, Tower promenade, St. Lucia
Tel: 21485180
Email: cfc@gov.mt
Website: www.tfal.org.mt