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Improving the response to mental health needs in Europe

Recommendation 1715 (2005)

Reply from the Committee of Ministers

adopted at the 953rd meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (18-19 January 2006)

1. The Committee of Ministers agrees fully with the Parliamentary Assembly's concerns regarding the improvement of mental health care policies, as expressed in its Resolution 1460 (2005), and has brought it to the attention of member states. The Committee of Ministers' own Recommendation Rec(2004)10 concerning the protection of the human rights and dignity of persons with mental disorder, extensively referred to in Assembly Resolution 1460 (2005), sets out full and detailed guidelines in its appendix for the protection of the rights of this vulnerable group.
2. The Council of Europe co-operates closely with the WHO and the European Commission in the field of mental health. In particular, the three organisations collaborated in the WHO European Ministerial Conference on mental health, entitled "Facing the Challenges, Building Solutions" held in Helsinki from 12 to 15 January 2005. The follow-up to the conference, as outlined in its Action Plan, is also the object of sustained cooperation, and efforts are being made to ensure that the Council of Europe's work in this context is coherent with activities undertaken by the European Commission and the WHO in this field. The role of the Council of Europe will be particularly to focus on the human rights aspects of mental health in the implementation of the Helsinki Action Plan.
3. In this context, and in conformity with the priority given to health issues by the Third Summit of Heads of State and Government (Warsaw, 16-17 May 2005) and the implementation of the strategic approach to health-related activities adopted by the Committee of Ministers in March 2005, the European Health Committee (CDSP) has agreed to set up a committee of experts in 2006 for the development of a consolidated policy tool leading to reviews of mental health-related policies. The committee's work will focus on the ethical and human rights mental health issues, stigma and discrimination.
4. The future committee of experts will be invited to make an analytical inventory of the range of existing Council of Europe policy measures related to mental health, identifying possible duplications and lacunae in the protection they afford, and endeavour to determine the "essential basket" of human/patients' rights, ethical social cohesion components in national mental health policies, to be used for the development of a model framework leading to the development of a consolidated policy tool in each country. The resulting policy tool should include two major components: a practical compendium of existing Council of Europe texts, with emphasis on ethical and human rights issues; and an ethical framework for a patient-oriented mental health policy, to be agreed upon as a European reference tool for decision-making and priority setting. It should detail and develop such basic principles as equity, access, non-discrimination, safety, citizens' participation, etc., most of which have inspired the present European model of health care systems, but are "at risk" because of economic imperatives.
5. Once the Committee of Ministers has adopted the terms of reference of this committee of experts, it will follow its progress closely. The resulting policy tool should allow member states to put into practice more effectively the Council of Europe's policies and strategies in the area of mental health, and will constitute an international reference for safeguarding and promoting the rights of persons with mental disorder in Europe.