



2004 Africa Workshop for Mental Health and Deafness

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AFRICA DECLARATION (WORCESTER SA 2004)

On 1st October 2004, 100 delegates from 10 African countries at the First Africa Workshop on Mental Health and Deafness (AWMHD) meeting in Worcester, South Africa, agreed to the following “Africa Declaration on Mental Health and Deafness”.

This AWMHD urges all African Countries to note that there are still many prevalent conditions in Africa, such as unequal access to education, information and services, which contribute to the high rate of abuse of Deaf¹ children, women and senior citizens, as well as traumatic life events and social deprivation, which lead to detrimental psychological consequences and mental health disorders among deaf people, from infant to adult levels.

This AWMHD believes that the Human Right to “respect for private and family life” and “liberty and security” (particularly for people in mental distress) should include having access to health services, consultations and information in the Deaf person’s language of his / her choice.

This AWMHD now calls upon the Governments of all African countries to legally recognise Sign Language (s) and take steps to ensure that health information is made accessible in the Deaf patient’s own language, to enable all to fully participate in decisions related to their own health, including prevention, diagnosis and treatment of health and mental health problems. Also, in the long term, to ensure that all teachers of the Deaf learners should be required to have national sign language skills and Deaf education knowledge before starting to work at resource centres for the Deaf.

This AWMHD strongly emphasises that accessible communication in the patient’s own language is absolutely essential to obtaining informed consent to all forms of treatment. Informed consent is vital in any situation when an individual may be harmed by losing his/her Right to Liberty, if consent was not obtained in a language accessible to the Deaf person, particularly in the case of voluntary or compulsory admission to psychiatric care.

This AWMHD calls upon each African Country to ensure that their Mental Health legislation includes mandatory requirements for appropriate and effective communication support to be provided, at no expense to the Deaf patient, at the time of admission or as soon as practicable thereafter within a maximum of seven days.

Signed on behalf of 100 Africa Workshop delegates.

Reverend A L Smit
Chair of the Africa Workshop Organising Committee

¹ In this declaration the term “Deaf” includes hard of hearing, deafblind as well as those who experience hearing loss later in life