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Mental Disorders and Epilepsy

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GRI Standards:

N/A

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Psychiatric and neurological disorders are now recognized as being among the first contributors to the global burden of disease. In developing countries, insufficient specialized human resources, inadequate training of primary care workers, traditional beliefs surrounding mental disorders and epilepsy, as well as stigmatization and discrimination, are the most common barriers to access to care. Sanofi was one of the first health companies to commit to improving access to mental health care in these countries. Through the Fight Against STigma (FAST) program with the World Association of Social Psychiatry (WASP), as well as a partnership with the Institute of Tropical Epidemiology and Neurology (IENT - UMR 1094 Inserm) from the University of Limoges, Sanofi has launched programs in more than 20 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Developed with local health authorities, experts, health professionals, patient associations and NGOs, these initiatives have enabled thousands of previously neglected and excluded patients to get access to mental health and epilepsy care and receive treatment in order to resume a normal life with their families.

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1. Background

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that approximately 450 million people worldwide are affected by mental disorders at any point in time⁽¹⁾. These disorders are found in all countries across the globe and they include depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety disorders, addictions, schizophrenia and other psychoses.

Epilepsy is a chronic neurological disease characterized by recurrent epileptic seizures, which are brief episodes of involuntary movements sometimes accompanied by loss of consciousness or other symptoms related to abnormal brain activity. More than 50 million people worldwide have epilepsy⁽²⁾.

Psychiatric and neurological disorders are now recognized as being among the first contributors to the global burden of disease⁽³⁾. Their impact continues to grow with significant consequences, in all countries of the world, on health and also on social and human rights with very important economic repercussions⁽¹⁾.

In developing countries, insufficient specialized human resources, inadequate training of primary care workers, traditional beliefs surrounding mental disorders and epilepsy, as well as stigmatization and discrimination, are the most common barriers to access to care. Although in many cases effective treatments exist, 75-85 % of patients with mental disorders or epilepsy living in low and middle-income countries do not receive suitable treatment⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾⁽⁴⁾.

2. Actions

In 2008, Sanofi joined forces with the World Association of Social Psychiatry (WASP) to set up the Fight Against STigma (FAST) Program. Fighting the social stigma associated with mental illness is a key factor in access to healthcare and rehabilitation. This program is dedicated to promoting access to healthcare for patients with mental disorders or epilepsy in developing countries. This program is now part of Access Accelerated, a first-of-its kind collaboration gathering more than 20 biopharmaceutical companies, the World Bank and Union of International Cancer Control in order to help address the full spectrum of access barriers for non-communicable diseases in low- and lower-middle income countries.

Through the FAST program, as well as via a partnership with the Institute of Epidemiology and Tropical Neurology (IENT, UMR 1094 Inserm), we have launched initiatives in over 20 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Developed with local health authorities, local experts and health professionals, patient associations or NGOs. These programs aim to improve access to care for patients with mental disorders or epilepsy in low- and middle-income countries. They are based on training health workers, raising public awareness, educating patients and their families. Thanks to these initiatives, thousands of patients who were previously neglected and excluded are seeking medical help and receiving treatment, so that they are able to resume a normal life with their families⁽⁵⁾.

To date, over 11,500 healthcare workers have been trained, over 3.8 million people have been reached through awareness and educational activities, and more than 134,500 people with mental illness or epilepsy have been diagnosed and/or treated.

Find out more about our FAST Program: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2tNrx7g4Qak>

2.1. MALI: DEVELOPING A RURAL MENTAL HEALTH GP NETWORK

In Mali, the three-year initiative has been implemented by Santé Sud, an NGO which has been working in this country since 1989. The program started in July 2018 with the aim to improve access to mental health care for the rural population in six regions (Kayes, Koulikoro, Mopti, Segou, Sikasso and Timbuktu) through the development of a rural GP mental health network and by raising awareness amongst the general population⁽⁶⁾.

GPs have gone through two face-to-face training workshops, which have both resulted in significant increases in knowledge (+150 % and +40 %). Both these were followed by individual mentoring sessions with a psychiatrist, which included supervised consultations and review of patients' medical records. Overall, between July 2018 and September 2021, 3,692 new patients have been diagnosed with a mental disorder and managed by the trained GPs.

Behavior Change Communication materials have also been developed (flipchart, brochures, radio broadcast messages). One hundred and eighty-three community workers have been trained, and it is estimated that over 76,000 people have been reached by awareness sessions organized by trained community workers or GPs. There have also been 336 radio broadcasts focused on disease awareness, reaching approximately 314,000 people.

To train a greater number of GPs, an eLearning platform has been launched, as part of this program. Combined with webinars facilitated by local psychiatrists, this eLearning program developed with WASP and the Université Numérique Francophone Mondiale (UNFM – World Francophone Digital University), has been implemented and evaluated with the support in Bamako of the Faculty of Medicine and of the Center of Innovation and Digital Health.

2.2. SOUTH AFRICA: UPSKILLING PRIMARY HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

Despite a high prevalence of mental disorders, with 30% of South Africans suffering from a mental illness during their lifetime⁽⁷⁾, South Africa lacks the required mental health specialized workforce to manage mental health challenges: there is only approximately 1 psychiatrist per 66,000 people in South Africa⁽⁸⁾.

To address these challenges, Sanofi has partnered with the South African National Department of Health, the Foundation for Professional Development (a private provider of higher education) and the World Association of Social Psychiatry to upskill and empower primary health care practitioners (HCPs – medical officers and nurse practitioners) to diagnose and manage people with mental disorders

The initial one-year program was based on a blended mental health care training approach combining a three-day face-to-face workshop with four months of eLearning. The ambition was to upskill across the nine provinces of South Africa 1,000 HCPs that practice in rural or peri-urban public health facilities. During the first phase, 1,120 HCPs completed the training workshops. Four hundred and seventy-two HCPs had started the eLearning and 337 of them had completed all 18 modules⁽⁹⁾.

Questionnaires completed pre- and post-training showed significant increases in terms of confidence in performing mental health activities and in managing mental disorders (+41% and +31%, respectively). The increase in confidence levels has also led to more psychiatric conditions being treated at primary care level, as shown by the decrease in the percentage of patients being referred to a higher level of care

A second round of training was organized in 2021. The three-day workshops had to be done virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic and 613 HCPs were trained (123% to target).

Find out more about our program in South Africa: <https://ncdalliance.org/turning-the-tide/films/meeting-minds>.

2.3. SENEGAL: LEVERAGING ELEARNING TO BUILD MENTAL HEALTH CAPACITY

To address the inadequate mental health training of primary health workers in Low and Middle-Income Countries and upskill them to identify and manage people with mental disorders, Sanofi has partnered with the World Association of Social Psychiatry and the Université Numérique Francophone Mondiale (UNFM - World Francophone Digital University) to develop a mental health eLearning platform with 12 online modules.

The initiative launched in Senegal in partnership with the Ministry of Health (*Ministère de la Santé et de l'Action Sociale*) combines the use of the eLearning platform with a series of six interactive webinars facilitated by local psychiatrists. The objective is to train 300 primary HCPs (mainly General Practitioners – GPs – and nurses).

As of 28 February 2022, 299 HCPs had registered and 64% had at least completed one module, with 20% who had completed all 12 modules and had each attended the series of six webinars. Average increases in knowledge achieved by Senegalese learners ranged between +12% and +22%, depending on the module, while their satisfaction with their knowledge and their self-confidence in managing mental disorders increased on average by +47 to +83% (depending on the disease area).

References:

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