

## **My Passion for Mental Health – Past, Present & Future\***

**Deborah L Y Wan**

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My pleasure for being invited by the Mental Health Association of Hong Kong to deliver the 14th T.P. Khoo Memorial Lecture in November 2012 and my chosen topic is on my passion for mental health-past, present and future. I personally know Mr. T.P. Khoo in the early 80's and he had the same passion as I do in Mental Health.

For the past 30 years in the Mental Health arena, I started as a volunteer of the Male Half-way House of New Life Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association (New Life) in 1974 and subsequently I was appointed as the Chief Executive of New Life in 1981 and I retired from this position in April, 2009. In a span of 28 years as the CEO of New Life, I had been actively involved in developing community psychiatric rehabilitation services, establishing new services and new centres, initiated the social enterprises in mid-90's and developed 20 of them and then I was awarded the Outstanding Women Entrepreneur in 2008. All these years were not sailing in calm water and there were storms such as opposition to set up the new halfway house in Shatin in 1983, discrimination and prejudice against persons with psychiatric disability, and the unemployment situation of serving clients. All these challenges were means for me to struggle to move on as to provide better services and alternatives for persons who have an episode of mental illness. The past activities of my involvement in Mental Health had been well documented in a video of 2009 which was broadcasted during my retirement party held on 29 May 2009 and produced by New Life Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association.

My major emphasis of today's talk is on the present position ever since my retirement as CEO of New Life and how I carry on my passion for Mental Health locally and internationally.

Ever since April 2009, I am committed to continue my contribution to the community through my volunteer work in Hong Kong, Mainland China, Asia Pacific Region and the world at large. I started as the President Elect of the World Federation for Mental Health (WFMH) from 2009-2011 and currently as the President of WFMH from 2011-2013. WFMH is a global civil society established in 1948 with the mission to promote, among all peoples and nations, the highest level of mental health. It has the consultative status with the United Nations and is in official relations with World Health Organization (WHO). In my official capacity, I attended the WFMH Congress in Athens in 2009, WFMH Congress in Cape Town in 2011, Mental Health Prevention & Promotion Conference in Washington DC in 2010 and also in Perth 2012. In addition, I also made presentations on global mental health in Thailand, Argentina & Perth. I represented the WFMH to work with WHO in promoting mental health in the areas of inclusion in the agenda for Health Assembly of WHO in May 2012 and made a statement. As a consequence, WHO issued a zero draft on Global Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020 and WFMH also submitted its comments. I was also involved in WFMH's signature project, the World Mental Health Day held in October each year. The theme for 2012 was "Depression:

A Global Crisis" and the promotion strategy package was prepared and delivered in October 2012, and had over 90,000 downloads from the website of WFMH (www.wfmh.com). The popularity of the World Mental Health Day is the evidence of the awareness of Mental Health over the world. Many places in the world celebrated World Mental Health Day in October and Hong Kong is one of the cities that held Mental Health Week/Month ever since 1995.

Another capacity which I held ever since 2009 is the Board Member of Workability Asia (WAS), a network on work and employment for persons with disabilities in the Asia Pacific Region. I participated actively in its Board of Directors' meetings which are held twice per annum and also the regional and international conference of WAS and Workability International. The Board Meetings were held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 2009, Trichy, India in 2011, Pattaya, Thailand in 2011 and Taipei in both 2011 and 2012. Apart from the Board Meetings, I have also visited the facilities on work and employment for persons with disabilities and the exchanges of ideas and sharing of information facilitate the member organizations to network and learn from each other. There is much more to be done in this area for work and employment for persons with psychiatric disability is still inadequate in most cities of the Asia Pacific Region.

Apart from the above, I have been appointed as the Honorary Consultant of Mainland China's Mental Health Exchange Association (全國精神衛生交流協作組(會)). In this new volunteer capacity, I gave advice to our counterparts in Mainland China and also participated in their annual meeting held in different provinces of China. I had been to Urumqi in 2007, Changchun in 2008, Kweilin in 2009, Ningbo in 2010 and Xian in 2011 and also to Urumqi in 2011. All these trips, other than delivery of keynote speech and attendance of annual meeting, brought me to see their medical facilities for persons with

psychiatric disability. I highly recommended two areas for improvement, one was to set up open wards in hospitals as not all patients required under lock and key and the second one was to set up rehabilitation programme for the in-patients and outpatients. Another important step was to encourage them to come to Hong Kong to learn our concept and facilities. And when they came here, I arranged and accompanied them to visit local hospitals, workshops, social enterprises, etc. As a consequence of these years' efforts, I have made an impact on them and I would be glad to share with all of you that one mental hospital in Urumqi set up a small farm at its backyard and during my last visit in 2011, the farmers (patients) were so glad to share their joy of growing vegetables and their mental state remained stable. Another good practice was a hospital in Wuxi set up a Rehabilitation Unit, adopting the practice of Hong Kong. Another example was the organization of a seminar for staff training on rehabilitation in Ningbo in late 2010. I expect to have more fruitful results in the coming years when new facilities set up in the Mainland China would have the rehabilitation component in both the physical environment and hospital programmes.

On the local scene, I have been appointed as a member of the Rehabilitation Advisory Committee of Labour & Welfare Bureau since January 2010 and also as its Chairperson of the Employment Subcommittee since January 2012. In this volunteer role, I continue to promote mental health and also represented Hong Kong to deliver talks on Mental Health Promotion in Singapore, Macau, Thailand. The delivery of talks was a means to share the rich experience of Hong Kong in promoting better mental health and also to stimulate other cities to adopt a positive approach towards persons with psychiatric disability.

My future from 2013 onwards, I will take a new attempt of educating the younger generation through conducting seminars and lectures for universities as

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honorary lecturer. My main objective is to carry the message of Mental Health to every single person and to educate them on the importance of promotion of Mental Health.

My future from now onwards, it will be based on my present involvement in both mental health and work and employment and I will continue my existing volunteer work for World Federation for Mental Health, Workability Asia and International. I will endeavor to network more people in the global and regional organizations as to share common interests in promoting both mental health and work and employment. I also continue my consultative role with my Chinese counterparts in Mainland China and will travel to different cities to give advice and support. I will continue my volunteer work in Hong Kong in rehabilitation and I fully support the rights of persons with disabilities in accordance with the United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

As from September 2013, I will become the Immediate Past President of

the World Federation for Mental Health and I will continue this role as to make an impact on global mental health. I also expect to be an active volunteer in the coming years as long as my health allows me to do so.

My Passion for Mental Health is already a part of my livelihood and I wish to share with you my commitment and devotion. Words cannot fully express my passion and only through my action and deeds of the past years that my flame of passion is still burning.

My Passion for Mental Health will continue and hopefully to influence others to have the same passion as I do. I believe in champion for the cause of Mental Health and the champion will succeed in making a difference for its people and the community.

I sincerely thank the President, Chairman, committee members and staff of the Mental Health Association of Hong Kong who are present today for sharing my Passion for Mental Health.