

PRESS RELEASE - Embargoed until Tuesday 18 May

BETTER MENTAL HEALTH TOGETHER



European Public Health Week, 18 May 2021 – There is a wide consensus that the COVID-19 pandemic not only affects physical health, but also mental health and well-being¹. The current pandemic is changing priorities for the general population, but it is also challenging the agenda of health professionals, including that of psychiatrists and physiotherapists.

On the occasion of the European Public Health Week, the Europe Region World Physiotherapy and the European Psychiatric Association highlight the importance of joining forces to optimize care and wellbeing by promoting parity of esteem in mental health, addressing mental health equally with physical health.

Key international and **EU level policy initiatives** increasingly acknowledge the importance to focus on prevention and address emerging long-term challenges for the health systems, such as the burden from non-communicable diseases, which includes mental health².

Evidence shows that people suffering from mental health problems often develop somatic symptoms, representing a major group of patients, requiring a multi-disciplinary approach and support from both physiotherapists and mental health professionals.

Depression, stress-related conditions and long-lasting musculoskeletal disorders affect millions of people worldwide, leading to negative consequences for their ability to work and impacting on their daily life. This is particularly true at the times of COVID-19. The pandemic and the related containment measures—namely quarantine, social distancing, and self-isolation—can have a detrimental impact on mental and physical health. In particular, the increased loneliness and reduced social interactions are well-known risk factors for several mental disorders, including schizophrenia and major depression³.

¹ Brooks et al., 2020; Shigemura et al., 2020

² More on mental health as a Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) on:

- New EU4Health Programme: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/QANDA_20_956
- UN Sustainable Development Goals: https://www.who.int/mental_health/SDGs/en/

³ A.Fiorillo, P.Gorwood, 2020. *The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health and implications for clinical practice*, European Psychiatry Journal.

Scientific studies have demonstrated that there is a strong link between mental and physical health, and that physical activity may be therapeutic for people with mental health problems.⁴

There is an increasing amount of scientific literature focused on physical exercises and targeted body awareness programmes for individuals with mental health problems, supporting the importance of physical exercise in mental health and psychiatric rehabilitation. Physiotherapy in mental health care contributes to the improvement of well-being and autonomy in people with physical and mental health needs, including psychological disorders and learning disabilities⁵.

In this context, a **multidisciplinary and interprofessional care** approach is key to prevent mental and physical disorders and promote the mental wellbeing of the population. In particular, mental health physiotherapists and psychiatrists should work together towards the provision of high quality, person-centered care.

Esther-Mary D’Arcy, Chairman of the Europe Region World Physiotherapy, highlights that “Never has the link between physical activity and mental health been more critical and more relevant than during this pandemic which has had such an impact on people’s health and well-being”.

Prof. Peter Falkai, EPA President, adds that "In times of isolation, like we are experiencing right now with the COVID-19 quarantine, systematic physical exercise is crucial to support our mental health and to prevent the aggravation of psychiatric disorders."

Notes for editors:

1. About the **European Public Health Week** 2021: https://eupha.org/new_challenges_in_mental_health
2. The **Europe Region World physiotherapy** is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation that represents the physiotherapy profession at European Level. The Organisation has a membership of 37 Physiotherapy Associations, representing 186.102 physiotherapists in Europe.
Physiotherapists promote and prescribe physical activity programmes in the areas of prevention, maintenance, promotion and treatment across the lifespan. We are the specialists in human activity and movement.
www.erwcpt.eu
 ERWorldPhysio
3. The **European Psychiatric Association (EPA)**: with active individual members in as many as 88 countries and 44 National Psychiatric Association Members that represent more than 80,000 European psychiatrists, the **EPA** is the main association representing psychiatry in Europe. The EPA’s activities address the interests of psychiatrists in academia, research and practice throughout all stages of career development.
www.europsy.net
 European Psychiatry
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⁴ [EPA guidance on physical activity as a treatment for severe mental illness](#)

⁵ Probst M, Helvik L. 2018