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World Mental Health Day 2023: holding mental health as a human right

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GUEST EDITORIAL World Mental Health day: ensuring mental health is a human right --Manuscript Draft--

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Corresponding Author:	David R Thompson Queens University Belfast School of Nursing and Midwifery Belfast, UNITED KINGDOM
Corresponding Author Secondary Information:	
Corresponding Author's Institution:	Queens University Belfast School of Nursing and Midwifery
Corresponding Author's Secondary Institution:	
First Author:	David R Thompson
First Author Secondary Information:	
Order of Authors:	David R Thompson Chantal F Ski, PhD
Order of Authors Secondary Information:	

GUEST EDITORIAL

World Mental Health day: ensuring mental health is a human right

David R Thompson

Professor of Nursing, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Queen's University Belfast, Belfast, UK

Chantal F Ski

Professor, Australian Centre for Heart Health, Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia

Correspondence to: David R Thompson, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Queen's University Belfast, Medical Biology Centre, 97 Lisburn Road, Belfast BT9 7BL UK

David.Thompson@gub.ac.uk

Every year World Mental Health Day is celebrated on 10 October. The theme for this year, set by the World Foundation of Mental Health, is 'Mental health is a universal human right'.

World Mental Health Day is an opportunity for people and communities to improve knowledge, raise awareness and drive actions that promote and protect people's mental health. Thus, it provides an opportunity to reflect on, talk about and look after mental health. As the World Health Organization notes in its current campaign, 'Mental health is a basic human right for all people. Everyone, wherever and whenever they are, has a right to the highest attainable standard of mental health. This includes the right to be protected from mental health risks, the right to available, accessible, acceptable, and good quality care, and the right to liberty, independence and inclusion in the community' ([World Mental Health Day 2023 \(who.int\)](#)). Good mental health is an integral part of our overall health and wellbeing and everyone has the right to access quality mental health care. However, the challenges posed in terms of prevention and treatment are enormous considering the current global mental health crisis. As noted in an earlier editorial in this journal (Thompson, 2020), mental health disorders are the leading causes of disability worldwide, with around one third of people experiencing a mood, anxiety or substance-use disorder during their lifetime, and depression being the leading cause of ill health and disability worldwide.

The World Health Organization estimate that one in eight people are living with a mental health condition. This can affect their physical health and wellbeing, how they interact with others and their livelihoods. Mental health disorders, particularly depression, and cardiovascular disease (CVD) are the two biggest health challenges facing health care systems, with up to 42% (Dhingra et al., 2023) of CVD populations having comorbid depression. Considering that nurses play a crucial role in the management of these patients, then the urgency and enormity of the problem become apparent.

The strong, often bidirectional, link between mental health and CVD is becoming increasingly recognised. For example, all mental disorders are associated with an increased risk

of developing CVD and the risk increases with the number of comorbid mental disorders (Michal and Beutel, 2021). People with severe mental illness - schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depression - have a high burden of modifiable cardiovascular risk behaviors and conditions and have a cardiovascular mortality rate twice that of the general population, and people with acute and chronic cardiovascular disease are at a higher risk of developing mental health symptoms and disease (Goldfarb et al., 2022). Alarmingly, young people (aged between 20 and 39 years) who have mental health conditions have three times the risk of heart attack or stroke as those without (Park et al., 2023). For instance, among young adults, depression and poor mental health are associated with premature CVD and suboptimal cardiovascular health, and although this association is likely bidirectional, prioritizing mental health may help reduce such harmful outcomes (Kwapong et al., 2023).

COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID pandemic has had a profound impact on the health and wellbeing of people in general, but especially on people with mental health problems and/or CVD. For example, it has unleashed a wave of psychological distress in many people and amplified or exacerbated any distress already apparent and its adverse effects on cardiovascular outcomes (Komiya and Hasegawa, 2021; Kronish and Schechter, 2022). The pandemic has also impacted CVD prevention and management, such as a significant decline in antihypertensive and lipid-lowering medications, and an increase in medications to treat type 2 diabetes (Dale et al., 2023).

The role of cardiac nurses

Cardiac nurses have a key role to play in mental health protection and promotion by improving knowledge, raising awareness and driving actions among not only patients, families and

communities, but also health care staff and students, many of whom are also likely to face mental health challenges. As well as addressing the care needs of patients with mental health problems, nursing strategies include recognizing and addressing issues such as social stigma and discrimination, and lack of access to appropriate mental health services. A collaborative, multidisciplinary and integrated approach to care between health care professionals is likely needed to better improve mental health and reduce CVD risk (Ski et al 2023).

Careful, systematic assessment is necessary to increase detection of mental health problems, especially with regard to depression and anxiety, and inform appropriate intervention (Thompson and Pedersen, 2023). Patients and family members will likely benefit from simple psychoeducation or psychosocial interventions during or soon after hospitalization. These may need to be tailored to individual need and circumstances and delivered by digital means: telehealth, internet or app. Mind-body interventions such as mindfulness meditation may be a useful adjunct. However, it is important to bear in mind the toll the pandemic has had on the health care system and staff. Many nurses and other health care professionals may benefit from approaches such as resilience training and healthy sleep promotion at the individual level, and leadership support and reduced clerical tasks at the organizational level in order to promote wellbeing and reduce burnout.

Following a healthy lifestyle is crucial to managing mental health, and this includes staying in touch with family and friends as well as colleagues, eating a healthy diet and getting adequate amounts of physical activity, rest and sleep. It also means trying to avoid exposure to stress-inducing situations and addictive substances, such as alcohol and tobacco.

The World Health Organization [“World mental health report: transforming mental health for all”](#) identifies the need for: a deeper value given to mental health by individuals, communities and governments; a reshaping of the physical, social and economic characteristics of environments (homes, schools, workplaces and the wider community) to better protect mental health and prevent mental health conditions; and stronger mental health care so that the full

spectrum of mental health needs is met through a community-based network of accessible, affordable and quality services and supports. Addressing individual, social and structural determinants of mental health, and then intervening to reduce risks, build resilience and establish supportive environments for mental health can be difficult and often requires action beyond the nurse's remit, scope or influence. However, nurses are aware of the impact of education, work, justice, transport, environment, housing and welfare, and can advocate, in partnership with others in the multidisciplinary (including, importantly, the mental health) team, for these on behalf of the patient. Working in an environment that can be physically, mentally and emotionally draining, it is easy to become overly task-oriented; however, embracing a holistic approach to care can enrich the lives of patients and the nurses who are there to care for them.

Conclusions

World Mental Health Day is an ideal opportunity to reflect on, raise awareness of, and mobilise efforts in support of mental health in those with mental health problems and/or cardiovascular disease. This is even more pressing during the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Cardiac nurses play a vital role in helping people - patients, partners, families, communities - to recognize and cope with mental health problems. This requires a sensitive approach and the provision of appropriate support to protect and promote their mental health and wellbeing.

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[World Mental Health Day 2023 \(who.int\)](https://www.who.int/world-mental-health-day)