



European Federation of Psychologists Associations EFPA Press Release

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EFPA Expert Conference: 'Major health gains to be expected from psychology'

'Preventive measures can reduce the incidence of depression and anxiety with 25% or more'. 'Health damage due to alcohol abuse, smoking and overeating can be lowered by changing people's behaviors and living environments'. These are conclusions from the expert conference '**Psychology for Health**', organized by the European Federation of Psychologists' Associations (EFPA) in Brussels on September 20-21, 2012.

The conference was attended by 75 psychological experts, representatives of the health sector, the World Health Organization, and policy makers from the European Commission. They discussed public health statistics, costs and effectiveness of current health interventions, research on behavioral origins of health and illness, options for treatment of mental health, and the added value of psychological interventions at young age, adulthood, and later age.

The experts agreed that much can be gained by better using existing scientific knowledge. For example, obesity, which currently affects 25% of the UK population, can be curtailed by stimulating people's physical activity with an intention planning technique or by stopping impulsive choosing of unhealthy foods through changed displays in supermarkets.

Evidence presented at the conference shows that psychological interventions do not only improve quality of life but are also cost-effective. Return on investment of health promotion at work is 10:1.

For bullying prevention in schools it is 14:1.

The ratio for prevention of conduct disorders is even 80:1. Treating depression and anxiety in patients with chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, cancer or asthma can reduce total care costs by 20%.

The EFPA conference was the first meeting of psychological experts in behavior change, prevention and treatment, and those involved in health care, schools, organizations, sports, and care for the elderly. The speakers addressed the share of behavior in the growing disease burden and current health inequalities, and the potential for improving health and lowering costs by better collaborating with the medical and nursing professions. They noted that behavior-based and cognitive interventions can lower the need for medical and pharmacological treatment, and that they can make such treatment more effective by making more patients follow doctors' directions and prescriptions.

Other experts confirmed that psychologists can help improving conditions in schools and enterprises, where stress and mental health problems hamper learning and performance. They are in a good position to recognize early signs of physical and mental illness, to prevent bullying, and to help averting suicide, an increasingly urgent issue in the current economic crisis. Healthy ageing is another area in which psychology can have an impact, by changing the mindset and behavior of people as they get older.

The European Commission is keen to see more psychological contributions in implementing its health strategy, as was stated by **Director General for Health and Consumer Affairs Paola Testori-Coggi** in her opening speech. She emphasized the importance of getting more help of psychology in reducing depression, anxiety and stress as well as in strengthening the integrative approaches fostered by the EU's "health in all policies" objective.

Dr. Arun Nanda, senior strategy advisor of WHO Europe, welcomed psychology's intent to deliver more, specifically in narrowing the health divide in Europe.

In closing the conference, **EFPA President Prof. Robert Roe**, confirmed the commitment of European psychology to the cause of health. He pointed out that EFPA is developing an **action program for better health at lower costs**, which will engage psychologists at the European as well as the national level.

For more information see:

<http://www.efpa.eu/PsyforHealthcongress2012>

<http://www.efpa.eu/psy-and-europe/psychology-for-health-contributions-to-policy-making-expert-conference>

Additional information can be obtained from:

EFPA President Prof. Robert Roe and President of the Congress Prof. Stan Maes

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