

Help us save the National Programme for the Protection of Mental Health (open letter)¹

Warsaw/Krakow, 13 August 2015

The Polish Parliament is hurriedly considering a proposal for disposing of the present legal status, role and significance of the National Programme for the Protection of Mental Health (NPOZP). The Programme, which until now has been part of the *Mental Health Act* since 2011, has been implemented with great difficulty and much resistance, in close cooperation with local governments as well as broad circles of professionals, patients and their families, to whom the idea of humanist and person-oriented reform of psychiatric care in our country is of great value.

The matter of psychiatric care in Poland should be a priority of healthcare policy because of the social aspect of mental health, which requires comprehensive solutions and a much broader approach than in the case of somatic illness. Every fourth Polish family experiences problems related to mental health; every fourth Pole suffers from mental health issues and every tenth from serious mental illness. Approximately 20% of senior citizens, who are becoming a growing section of the society, suffer from various mental health complaints. The NPOZP programme has given us all hope for comprehensive care, suited to people's needs, available close to their place of residence, preferably in a home environment. It has also given us hope for improving the dramatic situation of psychiatric healthcare and avoiding its possible final collapse.

The proposal to deprive the National Programme of Mental Health care of its legal status, by degrading it to the level of one of the many operational objectives of the National Healthcare Programme, designed under the *Public Health Act*, would definitely undermine its rank, role and relevance. It would be a manifestation of overt disrespect and injustice to all those who expect a vigorous reform of the current psychiatric care

¹ Board of the Polish Psychiatric Association wrote to the Chancellery of the Polish Parliament and in protest against the legislative proposal of liquidation of the current legal position of the National Programme for the Protection of Mental Health (NPOZP). The protest, along with an open letter on the liquidation of the NPOZP and the Expertise "Evaluation of the Public Health Act with special emphasis on the proposed regulations regarding mental health issues" can be found on the website of the PPA (Polish Psychiatric Association)

system, particularly all patients who benefit from the system, from childhood to the later stages in life, and their families.

We would like to highlight the fact that the legislator has neither consulted on this substantial change in the law with the Mental Health Council at the Ministry of Health nor with the Committee for the Reform of Psychiatric Healthcare and NPOZP of the Polish Psychiatric Association, which are the two most important organizations which have worked together with the Ministry of Health on the implementation of NPOZP in 2011–2015, and on the programme of its continuation for 2016–2020. The position expressed by the Ombudsman in the letter of 21 July 2015 addressed to the Minister of Health was also ignored.

We think that public opinion in Poland is entitled to be made aware of the critical conclusions of the expert report commissioned by Parliament entitled *Ocena ustawy a o zdrowiu publicznym ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem proponowanych regulacji dotyczących zagadnień ochrony zdrowia psychicznego (druk nr 3675)* [Evaluation of the Public Health Act with special emphasis on the proposed regulations regarding mental health issues – form no. 3675]:

... the liquidation of the current status of NPOZP, proposed in Art. 20, section 1 and 2 of the act under evaluation, is erroneous as it may cause damage associated with a very likely final failure to undertake the systemic reform of the mental health care system [in Poland]. The proposal should be deleted, and further work on a new edition of NPOZP for 2016–2020 should commence, under the current Mental Health Act. (...) (For more in-depth justification see section 2.2.5.2. of the full report). Under the proposed new legal status, after the introduction of the Public Health Act, some of the promotional, prophylactic and destigmatising activities of NPOZP would be shifted to the National Health care Programme.

We are aware of the situation whose consequences to the psychiatric care system would be as detrimental as those that could occur in oncological care if the National Cancer Programme was similarly undermined.

Please help us make sure that this change will not take place.



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Dr hab. Andrzej Cechnicki

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