The International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies

STATEMENT ON INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES, MENTAL HEALTH, AND TRAUMA
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The International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS) shares the commitment of the World Summit on the Information Society in recognizing the importance of harnessing and utilizing the unique revolution occurring in information and communication technologies (ICT) to benefit all within the world community.

Mental health is fundamental to overall health and productivity. It is an essential prerequisite for reaching the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs).   Mental health is the foundation for learning, thinking, communicating, self-esteem, resilience, as well as successful functioning in one's work, family, community, and society. Yet the majority of the world's people do not receive treatment for diagnosable mental disorders as mental health is often viewed as disconnected from health services. For many, the stigma associated with mental disorders compounds the neglect further.

More than 400 million people are known to suffer from mental and brain disorders and these numbers are expected to rise sharply over the next few decades, particularly among people in the developing world. Despite, the enormous social and economic burden so created, more than 40% of the world's countries have no articulated mental health policy, and over 30% have no mental health programs.

In his message for World Health Day, Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, stated, that a global strategy to address the mental health crisis is needed, which will incorporate both prevention and care; that it is time for governments to allocate resources and establish public policy to meet mental health needs. ICT furnishes an unprecedented opportunity to provide availability and access to mental health information, research, and quality services for all people.

Families are the primary source of care and support for the majority of children and adults with mental health problems and disabilities. Mental health programs founded on individual, family, and community strengths have the potential to both ameliorate problems and foster resilience. ICT has the potential to connect individuals, families, and communities and foster these supports within diverse cultures and also share knowledge across cultures so that no group is left behind.

ICT will facilitate the expansion of mental health expertise and scientific knowledge to benefit traumatized populations. Survivors of war, oppression, violations of human rights, terrorism, and other traumatizing life events, as well as underserved communities or those without services due to dangerous circumstances, will be able to receive support and maximize coping.

ICT will make possible wide dissemination of psychosocial education and augment the training of health-care providers to treat people with mental health problems and those affected by traumatic events around the world. ICT promotes equality and human rights by providing equal access, despite circumstances that would otherwise segregate, thereby eliminates the digital divide, particularly regarding mental health.

It is important to foster mental health as widely as possible for all people, including the mentally disabled, ensuring access to the most up-to-date information. This global access to mental health information will empower people to make the best personal choices. The prevention and treatment of mental illness and the promotion and protection of mental health via ICT, provides a necessary foundation for truly resilient communities within a global society.

— Written by E. Carll, PhD; Y. Danieli, PhD; J. Braak, MD