Intervention at Seventy-Fourth World Health Assembly, 24 May to 1 Jun 2021, virtual

By Dr. LO Veasnakiry, Secretary of State for Health of the Kingdom of Cambodia

Intervention – Group 3

18 Mental health preparedness for and response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Honorable Chair
Honorable Ministers
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

1. The Royal Government of Cambodia is committed to integrate mental health service into the different levels of care across the health system, with focus on the strengthening of primary health care such as the role of heath centres in line with WHO recommendations and Mental Health Global Action Plan.

2. We are in the process of developing a five-year Strategic Action Plan for Mental Health and Substance Abuse for 2022-2026 with WHO technical support. We aim to ensure its effective implementation and make mental health service more available to the people, especially in the context of COVID-19 pandemic.

3. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on essential heath services in Cambodia, including Mental Health and Psychosocial Support. In response to health and socio-economic challenges, the Ministry of Health in collocation UN agencies, including WHO, IOM, UNICEF and UNFPA and within the UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund has adopted a whole-system approach, covering communities, Village Health Support Group, Health Centres and referral hospitals, rehabilitation facility staff for enhancing quality of health service delivery on mental health and psychosocial support.

4. At a result, a range of key stakeholders across the country have gained knowledge and skills on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in the response to COVID-19. This includes more than 2,000 health staffs from health centres and districts referral hospitals, more than 600 front line COVID-19 health staffs and health officials of the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Defence, and medical volunteers. The Ministry of Health is making effort to integrate Mental Health and Psychosocial Support into the existing hotline of 115 at the quarantine centers.

5. At community level, awareness raising sessions on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support for villages chiefs and village health support groups with participatory and innovative approach. Awareness raising materials on COVID-19 related anxiety and depression management, suicide prevention and basic psychosocial support and relaxation were produced and distributed among population.

6. During the lockdown virtual trainings on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support was conducted including for Cambodian Red Cross staff. The “Operation Guide of Psychological First Aid in Schools” was developed and endorsed by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport for implementation at schools.

7. The COVID-19 pandemic response provides an opportunity for strengthening health systems for the Future. The Ministry of Health is making its efforts to transform mental health service delivery within the overall process of health system transformation in Cambodia.

Thank you!