

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN VENETO (ITALY)

According to the Italian health and social services legislation the responsibility for guaranteeing an equal minimum standard of mental health services to all citizens living in their territories lies on Regions. Veneto region is one of the 20 Italian regions, situated in the North East of Italy with a population of around 4.8 million people: the capital is Venice.

Regions carry out their duties in this field through Local Health Authorities: there are 21 LHA's in Veneto. Each LHA must have a Mental Health Department. The MHD is responsible for planning and coordinating all mental health services working in the LHA, including both hospital and community-based services and aiming at the integration between social and health services. It is run by a Director, supported by a Committee including the directors of the most important units of the Department, with an Assembly involving all staff and stakeholders of the local community. It work in cooperation with NGO's and Patients and Families Associations.

Each Mental Health Dept. should have at least one each of the following services:

- a Mental Health Centre (out-patient clinic): the front-office, responsible for the personal treatment programs
- a Psychiatric General Hospital Ward (16 beds)
- a Therapeutical Community (14 beds)
- a Residential Community (6-20 beds)
- a Protected Flat (4 beds)
- a Day Centre (20 patients)

The standard is 1 each of the above services per 100.000 inhabitants, apart from residential communities and protected flats (1 per 50.000 inhabitants). The duration of individual programs varies from 12 to 36 months.

A few data on the implementation of the Mental Health services in the Veneto Region are the followings:

- 805 beds for acute psychiatric emergencies in 40 general hospitals
- 337 community-based services, 111 of which are residential
- $\frac{3}{4}$ of community-based services are run by LHA's
- 3.000 staff (80% work for LHA's): 47% nurses, 24% care givers, 13% psychiatrists, 6% educators, 3% psychologists, 3% social workers (ie. 1 : 1500 inhabitants)
- 67.170 mentally ill people treated in 2008, of whom 12.421 admitted to general hospitals and 61.476 in community-based services
- Overall costs at regional level: € 250 million (ie. 3,5% of LHA's budget - Note: the objective of Regional planning is 5%)

The Veneto region planning and programming in the field of mental health services is supported by a Regional Committee on Mental Health, a steering group established in 2005 including representatives of local Mental Health Departments, Municipalities, LHA's, Academia, University, NGO's and Patients and Families Associations. The Regional Committee meet on a regular basis in order to prepare recommendations and proposal to the Regional Government: in particular, they recently produced the 2010-2012 Regional Plan on Mental Health, the Rules and standards for Accreditation of M.H. services and the Guidelines on Compulsory treatment.

The Veneto region approach to Mental Health services is based on the 1978 Italian Mental Health Act, which determined a radical shift from mental hospitals to community-care through the closure of existing Mental Health Hospitals, the provision of a few beds for acute psychiatric emergencies in general hospitals, the establishment of a wide range of community-based services and the definition of strict rules for compulsory treatment. The premises of the 1978 Act lies on a holistic (bio-psycho-social) approach to mental illness and the assumptions that mentally ill people pose no danger to society and hospitalization makes mental illness chronic instead of treating, curing or, at least easing it. Our view is that de-istitutionalization works were supported by a wide range of community-based services.