

## 2017 IFSW European Conference in Iceland

### Workshop Proposal by Georgian Association of Social Workers (GASW)

#### Title of the Workshop: Social Work in Mental Health: International Experience and Georgian Reality

#### Content of the Workshop:

***The Role of Social Work in Mental Health:*** The role of social work in healthcare setting, particularly in mental health, is tremendous in helping individuals, families, groups and communities reach their full potential and promote social justice. International practice has demonstrated the importance of social work in establishing social model in healthcare setting. In UK, social workers play key role in promoting recovery and social inclusion and can become Approved Mental Health Professionals and Approved Clinicians. In the United States, social workers represent the largest group of behavioral health professionals who assess and treat individuals with mental health problems, work with communities on prevention and awareness raising, are actively involved in developing proper services and refining mental health policies and laws to better meet the needs of target population as well as society at large. In Australia, social workers are authorized to work with individuals with mental disorders and their families to help them overcome psychosocial problems.

***Social Work Emerging in the field of Mental Health in Georgia:*** Social work profession emerged in Georgia within the field of child welfare in late 90' early 00'. While the profession is still very young, it has reached substantial level of development primarily in the field of child welfare. Mental health is among the fields in which social work takes initial steps in the country although the need for its development is obvious and well recognized within the professional community. This recognition is also demonstrated by the fact that Georgian law on psychiatric help mentions a social worker as one of the mental health professionals along with a physician, a psychologist, and a nurse who, in accordance with his/her qualification, is authorized to provide specialized help to individuals with mental disorders, although there is no further record or reference in the law that specifies social worker's functions, role or areas of involvement.

Nevertheless, Georgia has been making some progress in establishing social work in the field of mental health. In 2013, GASW organized series of supervision for social workers employed at state mental health outpatient and inpatient clinics in the capital and also joined the Mental Health Working Group operating with the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs (MoLHSA) to help government develop state Mental Health Action Plan. In 2014, GASW conducted a survey on social workers employed in mental health setting and launched countrywide mental health workforce assessment. The findings demonstrated that the need for well-trained social workers, guided by the relevant job description and supported by the effective system is pressing. In addition, there is a high need to help professional community, including policy-makers, develop clear understanding about the scope of work of social workers and its overlap with other mental health professionals (psychologists, psychiatrists, nurses, etc.).

***Mental Health Workforce in Georgia:*** At present, the main mental health professionals are physicians (primarily psychiatrists, also narcologists and neurologists) and nurses, while psychologists and social workers are highly outnumbered by others and the medical model of treatment is prevalent. A small-scale study on mental health workforce was carried out by GASW in 2015 to identify basic characteristics of Georgian mental health care and workforce through collecting information on variables including but not limited to: scopes and types of services offered; scopes and types of financing mechanisms; numbers and characteristics of beneficiary groups; numbers and characteristics of mental health personnel. The full

sample of Georgian mental health service providers that receive State funding (19 providers in total) was studied.

The study revealed that among various types of mental healthcare, outpatient care was leading, followed by inpatient care both heavily outnumbering crisis care and day care. Among the interventions, medication treatment was the most frequently offered service, followed by psychosocial counseling/aid, psychotherapy, and relatively infrequently - psychosocial rehabilitation and life skills training. The percentage of mental health workforce out of total workforce equaled to 39%, outnumbered by support personnel (46%) and outnumbering administrative personnel (15%). Among mental health professionals, nurses comprised the largest group (about 40%), followed by psychiatrists (25%), and other physicians (21%); psychologists (about 10%) and social workers (about 4%) represented the smallest groups and there were no occupational therapists. Per professional group, social workers had highest (53) median caseload, followed by nurses (50), psychologists (40), psychiatrists (35) and other physicians (31). Thus, the findings demonstrate that Georgian mental health reform has made progress towards diversifying mental health care and its workforce. Yet, it is clear that the system so far operates on the principles of medical model.

**Focus of the Workshop:** During the workshop the achievements and challenges of social work professional development in mental health setting in Georgia will be discussed in comparison with the roles of social workers in the same setting in different developed countries. The topics discussed will include: social work in mental health – international experience; developing social work in mental health in Georgia – overview of progress, findings of mental health workforce assessment, etc.; and lessons learned and future goals. The focus will be made on sharing expertise on developing social work in mental health. Presentation will be followed by discussion and Q&A session (30 minutes) with high hope for Georgia to obtain valuable insight and recommendations from countries in which social work is well developed in the field of mental health.

**Format of the Workshop:** Expected number of participant 70-100; theater style or roundtable lay out will be fine depending on the size of the participants.

**Presenter:** Ia Shekriladze, LCSW, Director, GASW, Georgia; Eka Chkonia, MD, PhD, Chairperson of the Society of Georgian Psychiatrists

**Moderator:** Nino Shatberashvili, PhD, Chairperson, GASW

**Length of the Workshop:** An hour

**Language of the Workshop:** English