Community psychiatry in Mozambique – a transcultural journey

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Abstract

Introduction: Historically the psychiatric clinical practice in Mozambique evolved from an eminently reclusive care setting, during the colonial period, to a phase where the patients were rapidly deinstitutionalized into their communities, in the post-independence years. In 1990, in order to restructure the mental health care network, the National Mental Health Plan was approved. Its main goal was to promote a semi-open treatment setting, activating the community role in the rehabilitation and social reintegration of the psychiatric patient. Additionally, to cope with the scarcity of human resources, a three-year technical degree was created, training medical technicians in psychiatry. From 1990 to 1996 the network expanded from six sanitary units to twenty-four, covering the country’s eleven provinces, with ambulatory consultations functioning in some of the general hospitals and in all of the provincial hospitals. Presently, there are two specialized psychiatric hospitals, one in Maputo and another in Nampula.

Objectives and Methods: Through the description of our 3-month community psychiatry internship in Mozambique, we intend to depict the country’s mental health care reality.

Results: Our internship took place in São João de Deus Mental Health Centre, the psychiatric hospital located in Nampula, which is responsible for the country’s northern region. Besides offering in-patient and ambulatory treatment, it also aims to intervene at a community level by promoting educational talks, theatrical plays, radio and television discussions and the production of didactic material. The various components of our internship will be addressed, namely: the hospital’s community intervention project, the developed activities, the most commonly observed pathologies, the cross-cultural relevant aspects, as well as the challenges we had to face in an occasionally harsh environment.

Discussion and Conclusions: As one would expect, the social and medical realities we encountered were quite different from the ones we are used to, forcing us to adapt constantly in order to surpass challenges of a multiple nature. Nonetheless, these were also the circumstances that turned this experience into something unique, extremely enriching and certainly unrepeatable.