

**EUROPEAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION (EPA)
40TH ANNIVERSARY**

**Speech by André Decraene – EUFAMI Vice-President
EUFAMI's Perspectives**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I represent EUFAMI, the organisation uniting the families of the persons affected by severe mental health conditions.

At EUFAMI we believe that it is possible for all patients to achieve control of their lives, to recover their self-esteem and move towards building a life where they experience a sense of belonging. We also believe that participation is an essential component of recovery and that Families have an essential role in this process.

To enable families to fruitfully achieve this goal there are a number of prerequisites and I would like to briefly touch five of them:

- 1. Up to date quality mental health services are reliant on multidisciplinary teams . The relationship between these teams, the patient and the families must be facilitated in a very practical way through working arrangements to ensure flexibility, availability and continuity of care. That is what is called the therapeutic alliance. That is why EUFAMI has welcomed the invitation to join the Board of EPA and consider this as a strong symbol of the openminded an inclusive attitude of the EPA members.*
- 2. Second prerequisite is the recognition that the development of comprehensive community based services places an extra burden of care on families. Suffering from mental ill health is often a matter of a life long journey. When there is a gap between successive phases of professional care it is often the family who is going to fill that gap. Let's not forget that families in mental health care are not professionals, nor volunteers. It is a status which they have not chosen.*
- 3. The third prerequisite for successful family involvement is that families must be listen to: they need to be taken seriously. Families are often the first ones to see that something is going wrong. Family involvement therefor is a huge accelerator of recovery, it also improves the quality of the recovery. However that is only so provided the family is duly informed with pertinent, necessary and useful, information and receives appropriate training in the form of accessible literature, courses such as family education courses, psychoeducation, and peer support. EUFAMI has developed*

a 20 hour training program to foster resilience of families so they feel more self-confident and are better prepared for their task as family carer but also to find coping techniques to come to grips with their own feelings and hesitations.

- 4. Continuity of care is of paramount importance. Services must be coordinated and integrated to meet the full range of social, psychological and physical needs of the patient. The structure and organisation of mental health care services should facilitate and encourage continuity of care. Seamless mental health care services should be available in a continuum stretching from the community primary care to specialist secondary mental health services. Multidisciplinary health teams must be an integral part of such services. These teams should include not only medical and psychiatric specialists, but also specialists from mental health nursing, psychology, social work, occupational therapy, and where necessary or useful other specialist professionals.*
- 5. The final prerequisites that I want to mention are a human rights based approach to recovery and core financing for organisations representing families and patients. As said, it is possible for all patients to achieve control of their lives, to recover their self-esteem and move towards building a life where they experience a sense of belonging. Participation is an essential component of recovery. This complies with the principles enshrined in the Conventions on Human Rights of dignity, empowerment, equality, non-discrimination, participation and inclusion. Involving family carers in mental health care is an integral part of a Human Rights Based approach to effective health care at all levels. Therefore governments must give full support to organisations representing family carers and patients by providing core financing.*

And finally I wish to congratulate EPA on its 40th anniversary. This does not come overnight but it is the consequence of continuous attention and converging dynamics.

Thank you for your attention.

André Decraene
6th December 2023
European Parliament