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25 Oct 2011, Loma Linda, California, United States
Jim Ponder/ANN staff

A conference on mental health held at Loma Linda University earlier this month highlights how Seventh-day
Adventist health leaders are aiming to help people suffering emotional problems by removing the stigma of mental illness in the church.

While many factors contribute to mental health, including a committed spiritual life, conference leaders said a biblical worldview doesn't automatically insulate people from things such as depression, anxiety and other challenges to mental well-being.

"We need to remove the stigma that some people have attached to emotional and mental health issues and recognize the vulnerability we all have to these issues," said Dr. Allan Handysides, director of the Adventist Church's Health Ministries department.

"The acceptance of a biblical worldview tells us that everyone is broken. All of us in the church need to address these issues with that humility," Handysides said.

The four-day event offered workshops and training for church administrators, pastors and health professionals to better recognize and treat those living in a faith community with anything from mild depression to a more severe emotional unbalance.

"We hope people will go pack to their communities with an understanding that mental health issues are very prevalent," Handysides said.

Organizers said the conference, "Emotional Health & Wellness: a biblical worldview in practice" was the Adventist Church's first global conference on religion and mental health.

"There is a consensus throughout the denomination that the time has come to discuss these issues," said Dr. Carlos Fayard, chair of the conference planning committee and associate professor of psychiatry at Loma Linda University School of Medicine.

One statistic revealed at the conference suggests that roughly 20 percent of people each year will seek some form of help for emotional health.

Dr. David Puder, a psychiatry resident at Loma Linda and conference participant, said the event underscored the balance of the profession's theories with a theistic approach, which he feels offers more effective outcomes.

"Under the theistic model of the art of healing, the healer taps into the God's love ... and brings that love to those he works with," Puder said.

The conference, held from October 12 to 15, drew some 500 participants and presenters from more than 50 countries and top universities, including Harvard, Duke, Brigham Young and the University of California, Los
Angeles, as well as the World Health Organization.

"Many times Christians say mental health issues shouldn't exist when we have a relationship with Christ," said conference participant Dr. James Tan, a physician in Longview, Washington. "I'm pleased that we're addressing this in a safe environment," he said of the conference.

Sergii Lutskiy, Health Ministries director for the Adventist Church in Ukraine, was one of 12 participants from the denomination's Euro-Asia Division. He said he hopes insights gained from the conference will translate into health benefits for people Ukraine, especially if some of the recorded presentations are translated into Russian.

The conference was sponsored by Loma Linda University schools of medicine and nursing, Montemorelos University in Mexico, and the Adventist world church's departments of Health, Education, Family Ministries, Women's Ministries and Chaplaincy.

Dr. Richard H. Hart, Loma Linda University president, said many conference presenters emphasized the centrality of mental health to spiritual understanding, especially as it relates to health benefits in the Adventist Church.

"It is gratifying to see our long-held beliefs echoed in today's literature," Hart said.

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**CT editor: Clear, transparent communication is 'lifeblood' of organization**

*Creative adaptation of new communication platforms necessary, Neff says*

23 Oct 2011, Lombard, Illinois, United States
Elizabeth Lechleitner and Ansel Oliver/ANN

The editor of one of the nation's leading Christian magazines affirmed the Seventh-day Adventist Church's commitment to corporate communication and the industry's fast-evolving best practices, saying that continuing such an investment yields dividends.
David Neff, editor of Christianity Today, said if the Adventist Church does not control its communication, someone else will. "It will get done some other way," Neff said.

To communicate effectively and benefit from reader interaction and feedback, church communicators must adapt to changes in media and communication platforms, he said.

Neff delivered his remarks during the keynote address of the Society of Adventist Communicators annual convention on Friday, October 21. Nearly 200 participants are meeting this year in Lombard, Illinois, for networking and training in public relations' best practices.

Neff was picked to headline the event because of his knowledge of current trends in communication, said George Johnson, Communication director for the Adventist Church in North America. The society typically selects speakers in the region of its annual convention. "We knew coming to the Chicago area we could draw on the knowledge of David and what he had to offer," Johnson said.

Christianity Today, based in nearby Chicago suburb of Carol Stream, was founded by Evangelical Protestant minister Billy Graham in 1956. It has a circulation of 130,000 and a readership of 275,000 including its digital offerings, according to its website.

Neff called communication the "lifeblood" of an organization. "Pay attention to your readers, what they need, what they think they need and how they read," he said. "Communicate vigorously, clearly and transparently. That investment will pay off. Don't cut back."

Neff's keynote address, "Google and Gutenberg," traced the evolution of communication platforms, beginning with the very first "early adaptors" who traded their scrolls for books in the 13th Century. Christians today can learn from how those in the past became clear channels for sharing Christ, he said.
"Revolutions in communication always mean new possibilities," Neff said. "New adaptation is necessary. Under God's providence, your creative adaptation can and will bear good fruit."

That flexibility is especially crucial as today's technology continues to present new media and platforms, Neff said. When he took the helm at Christianity Today in 1985, Neff said he felt the Internet was "ephemeral and perhaps amusing," but would never replace the permanence of print media. The magazine was America Online's first religious content provider. Now, 50 percent of organization's content exists exclusively online, generating media buzz ahead of the print edition.

While new media platforms mean an organization's content can go viral "incredibly fast," it also jeopardizes the organization's brand, Neff said.

The drawback of such quick distribution, he said, is that online readers don't know what and where they are reading. "They'll say they 'saw it on Facebook.' One of their friends posted a link, and the article is now associated with their friend's good taste rather than the journalistic brand that brought it to them," Neff said.

Also, with instant updates from Facebook and Twitter, more traditional media must adapt, he said. Video can evoke emotional response unlike any other media, but many communicators aren't capitalizing on that strength, Neff said. Instead, "we settle for a talking head and, at best, several talking heads in a living room setting."

Even online content must adapt as media platforms evolve, Neff said, citing a recent study that reported 6.7 percent of Internet traffic now comes from mobile devices.

Research of an audience is key, said Kimberly Maran, SAC president and assistant editor of Adventist Review and Adventist World magazines.

"I applaud Christianity Today for the research they're doing to find out how to better serve their audience," Maran said. "I think that's something that we Adventist Communicators can do more of and do better."

The society is scheduled to meet next year in Albuquerque, New Mexico, United States.
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