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## Challenges in operationalizing a community mental health program in western rural India

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Community based programs deploying community health workers have been used globally as low-cost alternatives to serve communities. These programs are based on a task-shifting model, especially in resource poor settings and require extensive training and supervision. Implementing such programs pose its own set of challenges at various levels. A community based mental health program was implemented by the Foundation of Research in Community Health in rural parts of Western India and a thorough process documentation was used to collect data by means of informal discussions and interaction with the program staff. Program level challenges included the onerous task of recruiting personnel experienced (in mental health) and sensitized to the topic, absorption of mental health concepts by individuals (without mental health background) and transferring the same to the community grounded in traditional beliefs, especially for mental health disorders; ensuring appropriate CHW to population ratio, establishing referral linkages, addressing rehabilitation concerns of the patients and supervising the heavy documentation. Community level challenges included working carefully around the power equations in the community, ensuring participation from the community, dispel misconceptions and suspicions regarding mental health and handling field emergencies. Systemic challenges involved the tedious process of attempting to transfer the expertise and knowledge gathered to the public health systems, attempting to include mental health care at the already over burdened primary care level, along with maintaining regular drug procurement to ensure a sustainable provision for mental health needs of the community. These experiences serve the purpose of improving implementation of community based programs.

### Biography

Nerges Mistry is a biomedical research scientist and a community health expert with a work experience of 30 years. She is the Director of Foundation for Research in Community Health and the Foundation for Medical Research and has guided several Post-graduate research students. She is a member of several committees at the central level such as task force on standard treatment guidelines and empowered program committee of the Government of India. She has more than 95 peer reviewed publications to her credit.

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