

Speech: Global Ministerial Mental Health Summit

A video recording of the speech is at the bottom of the page

Whenever I think about the scale of the mental health challenge before us, I take inspiration from a man who battled with his own mental health his entire life – and I use the word ‘battle’ quite deliberately.

For while he was a sufferer, he was never a victim. While he knew what defeat was, he was never prone to defeatism. He knew that each day required work just to achieve equilibrium. Or as he would have put it: “Keep the black dog on a leash.”

That man was Winston Churchill.

Were he alive today, he would quite possibly have been diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

There’s certainly no doctor alive who would have approved Sir Winston’s self-medication regime of champagne with lunch, brandy after dinner, and port, scotch and claret at all hours in between.

And I have no hesitation, and make no apology, for calling Churchill one of this nation’s – indeed one of the world’s – greatest ever leaders.

For while he may have had his flaws – which of us doesn’t? – he was ahead of his time in so many ways.

He spoke openly about his struggle with depression in the age of the stiff upper lip and buttoned-up emotion, when any discussion of mental health was seen as a weakness – he showed humility, compassion and leadership.

Thankfully, attitudes have changed.

But have they changed enough?

Have we done enough to tackle the stigma, prejudice and discrimination that people with mental health conditions endure?

Have we ensured that mental health and physical health are treated equally? Not just in terms of resources, but in terms of priorities?

And have we stopped to think about the mental health impact and the mental health needs of the people we rely on most? Our doctors. Our nurses. Our paramedics. Our carers.

This summit, today’s declaration and our commitment to achieving equality between mental and physical health is a bold, ambitious statement of intent.

For us to deliver on that pledge, on a global scale, we're going to have to change not only the way the public thinks, but the way politicians think about mental health. Because this is the defining challenge of our age. And it is a challenge which is sadly growing among young people.

In the UK, one in 10 children now has a mental health problem. Many of them will go on to develop serious mental health problems as adults unless they get the support they need.

For the sake of future generations, we must rise to this challenge. And I believe that together, we can.

And let us think about the vitality of this agenda this way:

The world has changed over a generation, where our lives, and especially the world of work, are defined less by our physical capability and more by our mental ability.

And in the coming generation, as we live through the march of the machines, and they increasingly take on cognitive tasks, so our lives will be defined by our emotional capabilities more than ever.

And as our shift in our lives moves from the physical to the cognitive to the emotional, so it's natural that we must shift in our healthcare to care equally about the physical, and the mental, and the emotional.

And I say this very clearly: some people still find this uncomfortable. Some still dismiss this agenda as being soft. But I defy you to talk to anyone on the brink, or look at the rising numbers of people in need of help, or live with the consequences of mental illness, and not to be moved by the scale of the task ahead.

So let us say: yes, some people find it hard to talk about mental illness. And our task is to make that easier, to break the taboo, to help everyone get the support they need.

Because it's good to talk.

Change is happening. At the UN General Assembly last month we saw the first ever standalone event on mental health, hosted by Bahrain, Belgium, Canada, Ecuador and the Netherlands.

The UK, together with Australia and Canada, has launched the Alliance of Champions of Mental Health and Wellbeing.

This coming together of like-minded people, all committed to progress on mental health, must lead to substantive and sustainable action around the world.

The UK has made tackling mental health a priority. We are now spending record amounts of taxpayers' money on mental health services, nearly 12 billion (pounds) this year.

We have set out ambitious plans to increase the NHS' mental health workforce by 21,000, and expand mental health provision to a million more people by 2021.

We are making progress towards no division between mental health and physical health. It simply doesn't make sense. Not least, because both are inextricably linked.

People with serious mental illnesses, like major depression or schizophrenia, have a 40 to 60% greater chance of dying prematurely, often due to physical conditions which go untreated like cancer, heart disease and diabetes.

We can't improve physical health without improving mental health.

So, I can announce today, we're putting a further £30 million pounds into global mental health research through the UK's National Institute of Health Research.

And Public Health England has launched its new Every Mind Matters campaign, which aims to increase the number of people taking steps to improve and manage their own mental health, as they already do, in increasing numbers, their physical health.

I have been moved by some of the stories I have heard during this summit. Particularly from the people whose conditions have actually become worse as a result of the poor or inadequate services they have received. That is clearly unacceptable.

We have to ensure that whoever needs mental health support gets the support they need. And that it's the best, most up-to-date support it possibly can be.

But we must also change our view of people who need mental health services.

They aren't just patients or medical problems. They're people.

We need to look after people as people, we need to foster a culture that's less popping pills and Prozac and more prevention and perspiration.

And we must not forget or neglect to care for our carers.

Because they aren't just doctors, or nurses, or paramedics, or health workers. They're often pretty extraordinary people doing very extraordinary things.

And we owe it to those extraordinary people to look out for them. And to look after them.

As this summit has clearly shown, what we learn in one field, one workplace or one country can be applied elsewhere. We can and must keep learning from each other.

For ultimately, this is about changing the way we think about mental health.

It's about changing attitudes.

And as Churchill said himself: "Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference."

I want to work with any nation, any partner who has a new idea or an innovative solution to tackle this global and growing challenge.

I want us to keep an open mind because while we should treat mental health and physical health the same, we know that treatment of mental health isn't the same or as straightforward.

So let us work together and on a global scale.

Let us act decisively.

And let us act now.

[Matt Hancock speech at the Global Ministerial Mental Health Summit in London](#)