

GAMIAN Regional Seminar Dublin: 31 May – 2 June 2013

Impact of financial crisis on mental health

1. Participating delegates from Ups & Downs:

Luc Van Eycken, Volunteer Ups & Downs Antwerpen
Rebecca Müller, President Ups & Downs

2. Presentation Rebecca Müller (Rebecca)

My name is Rebecca Müller. I am expert by experience (diagnosis Bipolar disorder in 2001) and I am the president of Ups & Downs Belgium.

3. Persentation Ups & Downs – Belgium (Rebecca)

Ups & Downs is a self-help organisation for people suffering from bipolar disorder and chronic depression. We support both patients and their family members in coping with these illnesses. We organise monthly self-help meetings in regional groups in Flanders (the Dutch speaking part of Belgium). During these meeting we give both information on bipolar disorder and depression and we give participants the opportunity to share their experiences. The combination of information and personal exchanges make the working of the Ups & Downs groups very unique. The participants feel that they are no longer alone and can share their experiences with other sufferers. Often people help each other with practical tips and ways to cope with the ups and downs of the bipolar disorder. At the moment we have eight groups in various cities of Flanders. These groups are run by volunteers who are often themselves patients or family members of patients. At the moment we have about 22 active volunteers working for Ups & Downs all over Flanders in the regional self-help groups and in the Board of our organisation. We have a website (with a home page in English) and a facebook group. We also provide brochures and leaflets with information regarding bipolar disorder.

www.upsendowns.be

contact@upsendowns.be

Facebook Ups & Downs community: <https://www.facebook.com/upsendowns.be>

4. Presentation Luc Van Eycken (Luc):

My name is Luc Van Eycken and I am from Belgium. I am an expert by experience and a volunteer with Ups & Downs Belgium. I have bipolar disorder. I am an architect and an artist (painting, glass art, sculpture). I have worked as an architect until 1995. After my diagnosis, I could no longer work. I now receive an invalidity pension from the Belgian Government. I am active in the Ups & Downs self help group in Antwerp. I also follow art courses and I am very active as an artist. I recently have exhibited work in the Psyc Art Exposition of Lundbeck in Belgium. I also give lectures and presentations regarding my experience as a patient. For example I give speeches for students training as medical doctors at the University of Antwerp. I represent Ups & Downs at various events.

5. Views from the patients and family members participating at the Ups & Downs self help meetings (Luc):

- Medication and blood tests have become more expensive
- Hospitalisation insurance has become more expensive
- Patients are afraid of the consequences of the crisis for their future
- It has become more difficult to find a job
- Patients are afraid that employers will avoid to hire them due to more difficult financial circumstances -> increase of stigma
- Fees for therapists have become more expensive: for example, preferential fee for psychologist has increased from 2 euro to 4 euro. This is an increase of a 100%

6. Views from professionals (Luc):

Luc Van Eycken has asked a few **psychiatric nurses** at the hospital in Duffel, where he was recently admitted about their view on this subject.

The nurses said that in September and October 2012, there were very few patients admitted into the hospital in Duffel. After that the situation went back to normal and the number of patients reached the normal level again.

Was this a consequence of the financial crisis that reached the top at that time?

The crisis has a high negative impact on people with a low income and this is not okay. These people should get more support during the crisis and not less!

He also asked his **psychologist** about the effects of the crisis and she mentioned the following issues:

- People are under more stress due to financial problems. This leads to more stress and this has a bad effect on mental and physical health: more mental health problems, more burn out.
- People who got treatment privately before will now request treatment at the Mental Health Centers because this is cheaper. The consequence is that now there are longer waiting lists to get a consult with a therapist. Also quite long waiting lists for consults with psychiatrists.
- In Belgium psychotherapy sessions with psychologist are not reimbursed by social security.
- People are afraid of losing their job or not finding work again.
- People get insecure and desperate and develop depression.
- People are confronted with higher costs of medication and treatments and are afraid when they are ill to go from work to a social security income.

The only positive effect is that people learn how to spend less money and pay attention to their expenses.

7. Consequences of the crisis for Ups & Downs (Rebecca)

Many pharmaceutical sponsors have stopped supporting Ups & Downs due to the financial crisis. In 2011 and 2012 we lost Lilly, Pfizer, Janssen as sponsors. This was in part due to the fact that the patent of the medication linked to bipolar disorder expired, but also because these companies had to downsize considerably and even had to lay off many of their own staff members. Only Lundbeck and GSK remain as sponsors.

Ups & Downs is now in contact with Service Clubs to see if they are willing to sponsor our association. We are also looking for other non-pharmaceutical sponsors, such as private companies and ethical banks.

We also had to increase our annual membership fee from 10 euro to 12 euro.