



Sixty years of the Institute of Mental Health

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SUMMARY

In April 2023, the Institute of Mental Health celebrated 60th anniversary. During this year several activities were dedicated to this important jubilee – first, a music concert was organized at the Atrium of the National Museum, named “The Sounds of the Soul”, then several movies projection were organized at the Yugoslav film archive in Belgrade with topic related to mental health issues and followed by discussion of professionals from the movie industry and mental health. There were eight clinical lessons organized within the Institute of mental health during 2022 and 2023 dedicated to the contemporary issues in psychiatry, and finally, the X Forum was organized under the title “60 years of the Institute – the past and future are here”. It was an excellent opportunity to present the work of one of the most significant psychiatric institutions in the Balkans.

Keywords: mental health; jubilee; psychiatry; institution

INTRODUCTION

Today, dealing with mental health is imperative. Data from 2019 indicated that one in eight people in the world has a psychiatric disorder, i.e., about 970 million people [1]. These data clearly indicates that any institution which dedicates its work to the care and treatment of mental health problems has not only public health importance, but also affects the functioning of society. The Institute of Mental Health has been an example of good practice for years, and the celebration of its sixty years of existence demands that it be recorded in the annals of Serbian medicine. On a significant jubilee, from April 19–21, 2023, the X Forum of the Institute of Mental Health was organized

under the title “60 years of the Institute - the past and the future are here”. The forum was an occasion to present the work of the Institute from its establishment until today, five symposia were organized, five satellite symposia with domestic and foreign students (Professor Bruno Fallisard, Professor Andrea Raballo, Prof. Aleksandar Dimitrijević), and a monograph with all the papers was published [2]. We dedicate this paper to this event (Figure 1).

HISTORY

Caring for people with mental health problems in Serbia began more than 160 years ago, with the opening of Doctor’s Tower, as



Figure 1. The Institute of Mental Health, 2023

Received • Примљено:

July 17, 2023

Accepted • Прихваћено:

August 24, 2023

Online first: August 30, 2023

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Figure 2. Founders of Institute of Mental Health. Standing, from left to right, top row: Dr Dragoslav Ercegovic, Dr Predrag Kaličanić, Valta Erdeljan, Head of accounting, Dr Milan Popović, Assistant Director Slobodan Gavrić, Dr Dušan Petrović, Dr Jovan Potrebić, social worker and Dr Mića Damjanović. Bottom row, from left to right: Dr Kosara Barjaktarević, Dr Slavka Morić Petrović, Dr Nataša Stanojević, Dr Vera Velimirović head nurse, Dr Jovan Bukelić

the first psychiatric institution in Serbia. By the decree signed by Prince Mihailo, on March 3, 1861, the “Home for those who went out of their minds” (orig. “Dom za s uma sišavše”) was formed. With the establishment of this first psychiatric hospital, the previous practice of treating the mentally ill by psychics, witch doctors, and monasteries was abandoned [3].

One hundred years after the opening of the first psychiatric institution in Serbia, Professor Dr Slavka Morić-Petrović, with the help of Alliance of Fighters Associations of People’s Liberation Wars fighters, founded the Institute of Mental Health – the first day hospital in Belgrade city center, the first of its kind in Yugoslavia and this part of the Balkans. It was a historic step to improving the approach to people with mental illnesses because treatment in day hospitals provided a new perspective to those in existing institutions; instead of isolating patients from the environment, the emphasis was on staying in the community. In 1963, a daily newspaper published an article referring to the “Madhouse in the center of the city” – how great was the misunderstanding of the new work concept is best illustrated by the fact that the Institute was said to be where “cosmetologists” work in psychiatry.

The Institute’s primary task was to provide primary, secondary, and tertiary mental health care on the territory of the city of Belgrade, as this million-strong city represented an ideal terrain for the introduction of new types of services such as outpatient services, transitional, and open psychiatric wards. Since its establishment, the Institute has been oriented towards the outpatient units. Apart from that, many different departments were there since the beginning, including day hospitals, the

electroencephalography cabinet, a laboratory, and the teaching-epidemiological department. The Institute’s principle of work was the joint, cross-departmental treatment of patients. It is especially important to point out the establishment of sociotherapy clubs for rehabilitated patients, called “Fridays at 6 PM” and “Saturdays at 6 PM”, as well as the existence of workshops with the protected work for psychiatric patients. The work of the Institute was also devoted to educational activities. Employees of the Institute were among the first to organize ten-day courses in social psychiatry and mental hygiene for general practitioners.

Other cooperation with other institutions was also significant, both through educational and scientific activities, as well as through providing more comprehensive support to patients. In this way, the Institute of Mental Health opened a new path to psychiatric practice from the very beginning, aiming to bridge the gap between psychiatric hospitals on one hand and the community on the other, thus becoming an “experimental laboratory for social psychiatry” [4]. With time, the Institute has grown its reputation, becoming a modern health and scientific institution, as well as the teaching base for several Belgrade faculties.

SIGNIFICANT PEOPLE OF THE INSTITUTE

Professor Dr Slavka Morić-Petrović was one of the founders of the Institute (Figure 2). In 1966, she founded the Laboratory for Human Cytogenetics at the Institute, and later the Genoprophylaxis Clinic. She was very active in the social and political life of the country at that time – the bearer of the partisan memorial in 1941, the Order of the

Republic with a silver wreath, she received the October Award of the City of Belgrade (1976) and the Seventh of July Award of the Federal Republic of Serbia (1978). Professor Jovan Bukelić described her as “a woman who has coastal stoutness and beauty” and who was “a revolutionary student, a brave illegal, a patriot, a creator of unquenchable scientific curiosity, a tireless seeker of the new, a doctor with dresses for every soul”. The involvement of Professor Morić-Petrović in the organization of home treatment was especially significant – home visits to mothers in labour and women who had children with Down syndrome in the territory of municipalities Stari Grad and Vračar. From today’s perspective, such a method appears to be a forerunner of the Institute’s current engagement in the implementation and organization of the family-oriented early intervention programme for children with developmental disabilities, which is implemented in cooperation with UNICEF and other organizations.

Professor Dr Predrag Kaličanin was one of the founders of the Research Department of the Institute. He worked in the fields of epidemiology in psychiatry, genetics, social psychiatry and was a teacher of exceptional moral purity. He was a consultant to the World Health Organization on mental health and researched community mental health care, the role of psychiatry in major accidents and disasters. He worked with refugees and exiles, and his publishing work was particularly fruitful – he published 48 monographs, textbooks and manuals.

Professor Dušan Petrović was also one of the founders of the Institute. He advocated for the introduction of teamwork in psychiatry and the improvement of outpatient psychiatric care. He dealt with the rehabilitation of psychiatric patients, psychogeriatric protection, psychosocial support to refugees. He founded the Geriatrics Counseling Centre within the Institute’s Dispensary, which at the time was the only counselling center of its type in the country.

Professor Dr Jovan Bukelić worked in the field of addiction disorders and obtained the first doctoral dissertation in this field in the Balkans. He published many essays, feuilletons, and original literary works in literary newspapers. In 1988, he opened the day hospital for children up to 12 years of age at the Institute.

Professor Dr Petar Opalić pointed out the inextricable links between sociology and psychiatry, pointing to existentialism both as a philosophical direction and as a psychotherapeutic direction.

Academician Dr Dušica Lečić-Toševski founded the Stress Clinic, Day Hospital for Adolescents, Departments for the Third Age, Forensic Psychiatry, and Perinatal and Reproductive Psychiatry, Journal Club for young people, as well as the Culture Circle on Wednesdays for hospitalized patients at the Institute. Under her leadership, the Institute for Mental Health was appointed as a Collaborative Center for Education by the World Health Organization in 2009, and based on the analysis of the results, it was appointed again for the period 2013-2017 and 2017-2021. She concluded a cooperation agreement with one of the most prestigious psychiatric institutions in the world – the Institute of Psychiatry of the Maudsley Hospital in London.

In addition to the aforementioned leaders of the Institute, many other famous professors, scientists, doctors, and therapists worked at the Institute: Dr Nevenka Tadić, Dr Svetomir Bojanin, Dr Veronika Išpanović-Radojković, Dr Dragoslav Ercegović, Dr Ivana Timotijević, Dr Marko Munjiza, Dr Ljubomir Erić, Dr Zorka Lopičić, Dr Smiljka Popović-Deušić, Dr Ivan Dimitrijević, Dr Žarko Martinović, Dr Andreja Krajger-Guzina, Dr Miroslav Antonijević, Dr Branko Ćorić, Dr Tomislav Sedmak, and many others. To date, 1,685 health workers and associates have worked at the Institute – neuropsychiatrists, psychiatrists, child and adolescent psychiatrists, neurologists, pediatricians, psychologists, special pedagogues, defectologists, social workers, pharmacists, molecular biologists, senior nurses and technicians, nurses and technicians, pediatric nurses, pharmaceutical and laboratory technicians, lawyers, economists, graduate managers, economic, mechanical and legal technicians, qualified workers. Each of them is important for the successful work of the Institute.

THE WORK OF THE INSTITUTE TODAY

The work of the Institute for Mental Health is based on three pillars:

- 1) treatment;
- 2) education;
- 3) research [5].

The Institute is a tertiary-level health institution that offers highly specialized outpatient and inpatient health services in the fields of adult psychiatry, developmental psychiatry, addictions, clinical psychology, epileptology and clinical neurophysiology, psychopharmacology, psychotherapy, prevention of mental disorders, as well as protection and improvement of mental health, medical biochemistry and medical supply – pharmaceutical activities.

The Institute is the teaching base of several faculties: the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Belgrade, the Faculty of Special Education and Rehabilitation, the Faculty of Political Sciences, the Department of Psychology and Social Protection of the Singidunum University, as well as schools: Colleges for Social Work, Secondary, Higher and Higher Medical schools of professional studies. The Institute has established cooperation with many other institutions, and through cooperation agreements, it carries out various activities. The Institute currently has 242 employees, of which 51 are specialists in psychiatry, child and adolescent psychiatry and neurology, 15 doctors on specialization, 16 psychologists, seven graduated social workers, two biologists, four occupational therapists, 111 nurses and technicians, two pharmacists, three defectologists, five special pedagogues, four laboratory and pharmaceutical technicians, 22 members of the economic and legal service. There are 24 Doctors of Science, nine masters, eight subspecialists and 12 medicus primus working at the Institute (Figure 3).

As part of its activities, the Institute approaches the treatment of mental disorders through applying established professional and doctrinal criteria, that is, the principles

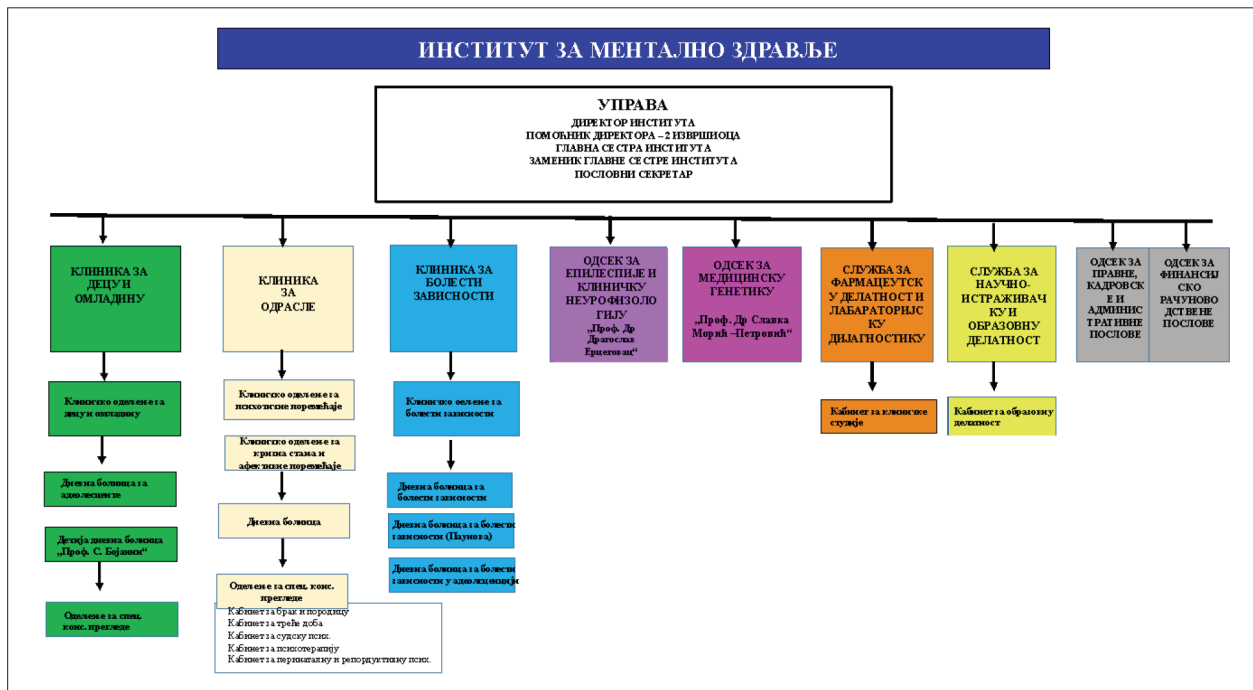


Figure 3. Current structure of Institute of Mental Health

of good clinical practice; prevention of mental disorders and improvement of mental health; education (basic and postgraduate studies), continuous education, specialization and subspecialization for its associates, as well as health workers and health associates of other health institutions and other legal entities; research in all areas of psychiatry, psychology and related disciplines according to the principles of good scientific practice. It also focuses on the implementation of measures to prevent possible complications and adverse consequences in healthcare, as well as general security measures during the stay of citizens at the Institute, ensuring constant control of the implementation of these measures. The Institute's accreditation with the Agency for Accreditation of Healthcare Institutions of Serbia was carried out in 2020 and will be valid for seven years.

Over 50,000 dispensary examinations and over 2,000 hospitalizations with an average length of treatment of 21.4 days are performed annually at the Mental Health Institute.

When it comes to addictions, the Institute has a Day Hospital for Addiction in Adolescence, which was founded in 2003, and is a unique day hospital for the population of young people aged 12–18 years with addiction problems in Serbia. The day hospital works according to the principles of systemic group family therapy, which implies that, in addition to adolescents, parents must be involved in the therapeutic process, not as companions, but as co-patients.

Apart from this day hospital, the Day Hospital for Children “Prof. Dr Svetomir Bojanin” for diagnosis and treatment of children with complex developmental and emotional problems. Children aged 2–12 are admitted to the Children's Day Hospital. The work of the Children's Day Hospital is based on collaborative, cross-departmental diagnostic assessment, daily educational playroom group activities for young children conducted by the teachers of

the “Savski venac” preschool institution, and other group and individual treatments for children and parents. The Day Hospital for Adolescents, which also has a unique programme, offers partial hospitalization for adolescents and young people with psychological problems and difficulties in the identity formation, aged 15–25. Treatment includes pharmacotherapy, individual, group, family, and “Milieu” therapy.

What sets the Institute apart from other psychiatric institutions is the fact that children and adults are treated under the same roof, as well as its special organizational units that do not exist in other institutions – the Cabinet for Marriage and Family; Cabinet for Reproductive and Perinatal Psychiatry; Cabinet for Forensic Psychiatry; Cabinet for the Third Age; Cabinet for Psychotherapy and Cabinet for Clinical Studies.

RESEARCH

The first scientific research of the Institute was conducted in the Experimental Laboratory for Social Psychiatry from 1963 to 1969 [6]. An assessment of the psychological, social, and professional characteristics of psychiatric patients was carried out, as well as the determination of the value of certain rehabilitation methods, that is, which methods and procedures are most suitable for patients. Until today, the Institute has carried out national and international research projects, the last of which relates to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the “CoV2Soul.rs” project (2021–2022), the prevalence of the most common psychiatric disorders among a representative population of adults in the Republic of Serbia was examined for the first time using an in-depth clinical interview conducted by experts in the field [7]. In this way, the long tradition of



Figure 4. The future of Institute of Mental Health – young specialists, residents, and psychologists of the Institute

epidemiological research at the Institute was continued. In addition to epidemiological, the Institute also conducts other types of research. On average, about 30 research outputs per year are conducted at the Institute, as part of the post-graduate training of academics or larger, multidisciplinary research groups.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Improving the competence of experts through education, by strategically and systematically promoting educational activity and organizing scientific gatherings and symposiums is one of the strategic goals of the Institute. Educational courses, seminars, symposia and psychotherapy education are organized regularly. Since 2009, more than 220 programs have been accredited, and an average of 200 participants from the country and abroad complete the training each year.

The Institute for Mental Health is accredited by the European Association for Psychotherapy as a Training Institute for educating experts in the field of systemic

family therapy and psychoanalytic psychotherapy. In addition, the Institute conducts over 20 different educational programs every year. The Institute highlights several of them, which have existed almost since its foundation – Mental Hygiene of the Developmental Age and Psychomotor Reeducation, as well as newer ones, such as the School of Clinical Neuropsychology, organized since 2021. Ten Forums of the Institute for Mental Health have been organized so far, with the participation of experts from the Institute, as well as from other institutions in the country, as well as well-known European and international institutions.

In addition to external training, the Institute also conducts internal training. “Lessons,” which are traditionally organized twice a month (since 2005), and are intended for all employees of our institution, while the “Book club”, Clinical classes, Continuous development of scientific and professional youth and “Conversations with experts” are intended for younger colleagues currently specializing in psychiatry, clinical psychology, defectology, etc. Numerous lectures within the framework of these educational activities are available on the Institute’s official YouTube channel.

In cooperation with other related institutions and as a teaching base of several faculties (e.g. Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Philosophy, Faculty of Special Education and Rehabilitation, Faculty of Political Sciences, etc.), colleges, higher and secondary schools, our employees contribute significantly to the education of health workers and health associates as lecturers and teachers.

PUBLICATIONS

Since 1969, the Institute has published the journal “Annals of the Institute for Mental Health,” which was renamed to “Psychiatry Today” in 1975. In 2022, the Institute launched the quarterly “Scientific Bulletin of the Institute of Mental Health,” available in Serbian and English. Six new publications were published for the 60th anniversary of the Institute. The Institute has so far published 73 books or monographs by its employees [8, 9, 10].

THE FUTURE OF THE INSTITUTE

Psychiatry is undergoing major changes. In the modern world, the well-being of people with psychiatric disorders and their relatives depends not only on the cooperation

of experts of different profiles, but also on intersectoral cooperation and available resources [11]. The evolution of modern psychiatry is in the direction of greater integration of scientific concepts: a deeper study of the classifications of psychiatric disorders, a more systematic and comprehensive diagnostic evaluation, personalized psychopharmacology, as well as further improvement of psychotherapy is necessary [12]. The value of the Institute lies in the continuous striving for the new, as well as in the wealth of diverse fields we work in. The Institute’s plan is to continue pursuing contemporary trends and to continue active participation in the development of psychiatry as a scientific and clinical discipline. Work with young people, continuation of training programs and their constant enrichment, modernization of work through the introduction of new technologies, continuation of scientific research projects are just some of the plans for the future (Figure 4). The possibilities for a better future are limitless. Regardless, it is certain that the fundamental doctor/expert–patient relationship will remain a constant that will preserve the integrity of psychiatry as a profession.

This article was written in accordance with the ethical standards of the institution and the journal.

Conflict of interest: None declared.

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