

## Greater support needed for the mentally ill — Ferguson

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MINISTER of Health Dr Fenton Ferguson is calling for a collective approach to understanding and providing the necessary support to persons who are beset by schizophrenia, a mental disorder characterised by abnormal social behaviour

He says the stigma associated with the mental disorder needs to be reduced, adding that with increased awareness of the effects of the illness by community members, those affected can live normal lives.



Health Minister Dr Fenton Ferguson (left) receives a mental health poster from Pan American Health Organisation /World Health Organisation (WHO) representative to Jamaica Dr Noreen Jack during a World Mental Health Day function held at the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, St Andrew, last Friday. (PHOTO:JIS)



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"I call upon all Government agencies, partners, and communities, to work together to improve services and care for people with mental illness, especially persons suffering from schizophrenia," he says, while commending supporting groups, including the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO), who he says have been working with the mentally ill.

The minister was delivering the keynote address at a World Mental Health Day function held last Friday at the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, St

Andrew, under the theme: "Living with Schizophrenia".

Stressing that persons with Schizophrenic conditions are making meaningful contributions to the society, Dr Ferguson told his audience that it has resulted from appropriate diagnosis and adherence to effective treatment, mainly through the ministry's Community Mental Health Services Department.

"Medication for Schizophrenia is available through the public mental health services supported by the National Health Fund. In recent years, there have been significant improvements in the medication, some offering effectiveness with less side effects, promoting easier adherence and compliance with treatment," he said.

The minister said other improved treatment and interventions for mental illness include counselling, and psychotherapy, vocational rehabilitation, occupational therapy, and psychosocial rehabilitation, adding that "the input of families, friends, support and advocacy groups, and the public are [also] of great importance".

Dr Ferguson informed that the ministry's work with mentally ill is made more effective with the support from groups such as the Kingston-based Open Heart; the Ebenezer Home in Manchester; Open Heart in Montego Bay; Portland Rehabilitation Centre; and the WASP, in Westmoreland, as well as the Montego

Bay-based Committee for the Upliftment of the Mentally Ill.