



**Chief Executives Board
for Coordination**

CEB/2009/HLCM/HR/4

22 January 2009

Meeting of CEB HR Network17th Session

UNWTO, Madrid, 4-6 March 2009

STAFF AND STRESS COUNSELLORS' SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPReport to the HR Network**I. Background**

1. The origin of the Staff and Stress Counsellors' Special Interest Group (SSCG) goes back to the year 2000, when the WFP Staff Counsellors invited several colleagues in the UN system to join in their annual meeting. During this first meeting in Rome, twelve counsellors from WFP, FAO, UNHCR, DPKO and the UN Secretariat, as well as one from MSF, participated in sessions to share their work experiences and visions about the future direction of staff counselling in the UN. The participants also worked with invited specialists and trainers to explore new techniques and approaches in counselling. It marked the beginning of the Staff and Stress Counsellors "Network" and represented the first organised opportunity for counsellors to support one another. Since then, the counsellors have met each year, and the group has grown in membership and participation.

2. In recent years, formalization was proposed to better use the expertise of the group within the UN system. Given that most of the counsellors work within the HR departments, and that the HR departments make decisions and decide strategies about staff well being, the group decided to seek formalisation under the HR Network. The HR Director, IAEA presented the issue at the HR Network meeting in March 2008. With the support of a number of HR Directors, formalization was achieved in 2008 under the name Staff and Stress Counsellors Special Interest Group (SSCG). The HR Network requested and received from the SSCG:

- Terms of Reference (attached)
- Clarification of the working relationship with the Critical Incident Stress Management Unit of UNDSS.

II. Update on activities

3. The report of the 9th Annual Meeting of the SSCG is attached for the information and comments of the HR Network members.

UN Staff/Stress Counsellors Special Interest Group

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. The Terms of Reference for the Staff/Stress Counsellors Special Interest Group (SSCG) will be to:
 - (i) Promote consistent, professional staff / stress counselling practices in the UN system. The term counsellor is defined as mental health professionals and social workers in the positions of Staff/Stress Counsellors.
 - (ii) Identify best practice examples in the practical work and policy areas that may be beneficial to harmonize across the UN System.
 - (iii) Enable and encourage interagency cooperation and sharing of resources for the benefit of staff well-being and welfare, in particular the management of staff & organizational stress.
 - (iv) Provide peer / professional support for the UN System Staff/Stress Counsellors.
 - (v) Improve professional skills of its members through skills training at the annual meeting
 - (vi) Maintain a website used for sharing professional resources.
 - (vii) Open membership to all counsellors throughout the UN System, regardless of agency

2. Leadership:
 - (i) The SSC will be led by a Coordinating Committee (CC) representing three different UN system wide organizations, elected at the annual meeting. The CC will be elected to serve a two year term.
 - (ii) The Coordinating Committee will discuss & plan strategy and policy issues, including quality standards for counsellors in the UN system, training issues, and to plan for the meeting of the larger group.
 - (iii) The Coordinating Committee will consult and be supported by the advisory team comprising of the heads of counselling services in larger agencies such as : UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, World Bank, WHO.
 - (iv) The Coordinating Committee will liaise and collaborate with the UN Medical Directors Group, the IASMN and UNDSS/CISMU and the UN Ombudsmen and other bodies.

3. The Coordinating Committee of the Staff/Stress Counsellors (SSC) will report to the Human Resources Network on the following:
 - (i) Identification of, advice on and advocacy for improvements in the existing human resources management systems, policies and practices relevant to staff well-being and welfare;
 - (ii) Analyses of common stresses and stress risks for UN System staff and of counselling practices in the UN system and elsewhere, as a basis for advising on minimum standards and best practices for counselling services;

- (iii) Collaborative efforts undertaken among counsellors for supporting staff and managers, and cooperation and links by the SSCG with other UN System bodies (e.g., UN Medical Directors Group, IASMN/UNDSS Working Group on Critical Incident Stress, etc.)

4. Meetings:

- (i) The annual meeting of the large group of UN Staff / Stress Counsellors will include training and learning sessions in areas of professional practice and discussion of recommendations from the Coordinating Committee regarding policy and guidance on staff well-being and welfare issues. Where necessary, working groups will be organised on key issues for follow up. An external facilitator will be appointed to facilitate the large meeting of the SSC, in collaboration with the Coordinating Committee.
- (ii) The Coordinating Committee will meet once a year, in between the annual meetings and it may invite the members of the advisory team when required.
- (iii) Minutes of the meeting will be taken and shared with all members in the form of a report.
- (iv) Funding should be made available for the organization and attendance of the annual meeting.

9th Annual Meeting of the Staff and Stress Counsellors' Special Interest Group

1. The SSCG met in Luxor, on 14-17 October 2008 and it addressed a number of professional and technical themes as well as the management of the group. This paper summarizes the key themes discussed and outlines the Action Plan agreed for 2009.
2. The meeting was attended by 22 counsellors from 14 UN system organisations, plus one invited counsellor from MSF (see the list of participants in Appendix 2).
3. The agenda included sessions on:
 - issues related to formalisation of the group and its leadership;
 - professional themes;
 - technical issues and tools.

A. Formalisation and Leadership

4. A significant portion of time was given to the revision of the Terms of Reference of the SSCG. It was agreed to keep the leadership model of 3 members of the network voted by the participants. This coordinating committee would be supported and would consult a core advisory group consisting of senior counsellors from several UN system agencies and organisations.
5. The draft Terms of Reference were shared with all and the discussion resulted in minor adjustment. The finalised Terms of Reference are attached to this report and presented to the HR Network for their endorsement.
6. The group elected the members of the Coordinating Committee for the next two years:
 - Kamran Ahmad, WFP
 - Patience Gebauer, IAEA/UNOV
 - Dubravka Suzic-Kofi, UNHCR

Their task will be to coordinate the activities of the SSCG over the next two years, organise the annual meetings in 2009 and 2010 and report to and communicate with the HR Network.

B. Professional themes

7. Six professional themes were treated. Each was presented in a brief session by one of the counsellors. In-depth discussions on each took place in smaller groups which then fed back their conclusions to the plenary.
8. The session on **burnout** expressed its concerns over the excessive use of this term in the UN workplace. The meaning of the word was being lost and the seriousness of that condition was being trivialized. The group endorsed a proposal to prepare a position paper on burnout and present it to the HR Network and the Medical Network to raise awareness and

identify/support joint action. Prevention of burnout amongst the counsellors was also mentioned. The working group that will take on this tasks has counsellors from IAEA; FAO, UNHCR, UNON and DPKO.

9. The session on **harassment in the workplace** reiterated that the counselling support to all parties involved is important but it was also emphasized that the teams should not be forgotten. The work of a counsellor in this context needs to be closely linked to that of the ombudsman, HR personnel and the mediator who all share collective responsibility in these cases. It was suggested that a counsellor should play a key role in prevention of harassment.
10. The session on **substance abuse** presented different practices of several UN system organizations and identified some problems with the implementation of the current UN policy on supporting the staff experiencing problems with substance abuse. It was considered that the current policy is not as effective as it could be if more accountability is used. It was concluded that a small group including the counsellors from UN Secretariat, IAEA and UNHCR would provide input into the current policy revision ready to be issued in June 2009.
11. The presentation on **mediation** as one of the possible role of a counsellor indicated that the counsellor's professional competencies could be value added to the mediator's competences. It emphasized that the training for the mediator is distinctively different from a training of a counsellor but that two could be very complementary.
12. WFP presented their research on **Counselling practices across cultures** demonstrating how western counselling concepts may not be efficient in the non-western context and advocating for the cultural sensitivity of a counsellor. This work was commended and other organisations were encouraged to invest their resources in documenting their work.
13. The session on **confidentiality** focused on challenges counsellors face in protecting the confidentiality of their work in the UN system, including vis-à-vis their direct supervisors. It was agreed that a Code of Ethics for the Staff and Stress Counsellors be drafted and submitted to the HR Network for its endorsement. A working group consisting of counsellors from WHO, WTO, World Bank, UN Secretariat, UNHCR, ICTY and CISMU was established.

C. Technical issues and tools

14. A proposal was presented to create a unified database of non-UN counsellors worldwide, who would be available to offer services to UN staff. The database would be accessible to the staff directly from the internet and its purpose would be to increase the access to counselling. The participants felt that investment needed to develop this project would be much higher than the usefulness of this database. The counsellors also challenged quality control and liability of such a tool and where not supportive of the project as presented. It was agreed that instead, the counsellors will unify their referral contacts and that the database will be made available to counsellors rather than to the staff.

D. Plan of Action

15. The SSCG agreed that the priority projects for 2009 were:

- A position paper on burnout
- Code of Ethics for UN system Staff and Stress Counsellors

Both will be submitted to the HR Network.

Other projects to be worked on were:

- Development of the counsellors database
- Input to the UN policy on Substance abuse

16. Efforts will be made to schedule the next meeting in fall of 2009 so that it coincides in terms of time and venue with the meeting of the Medical Network. The Coordinating Committee will follow up on that.

Appendix 1

Agenda for the 9th Annual Meeting of the Staff and Stress Counsellors' Group Luxor, Egypt. 14–17 October, 2008

Tuesday - 14/10/08

9:30 **Opening—Welcome and Re-Connecting**

10:15 **Sharing Professional Experiences/Challenges**

Share a specific experience/current challenge (Thinking more broadly than a single clinical case, what is a key challenge you face in your personal or professional life that affects your professional service? How is this challenge reflected in your professional service and how are you addressing it?)

Participants meet in small groups and then in plenary at the end to share any ideas or suggestions that might be helpful for everyone to hear. This session starts in the morning and continues on after lunch

12:30 **Lunch**

2:00 **Sharing Professional Experiences/Challenges (continued from am)**

3:30 **SSCG TORs— Penelope**

Roles and requirements of the SSCG and other information sharing on the formalization process. Penelope will outline the key points here on the first day of the meeting for SSCG members to consider and discuss informally during the week; the group will revisit the TORs and any other formalization matters on Friday.

5:00 **End of Day**

Wednesday - 15/10/08

9:00 **Professional/Technical Themes**

- Dealing with Staff Experiencing a Burn-Out: Preventions and Interventions (Flavia)
- Harassment and Abuse of Power (Peninah)
- Dealing with Alcoholics and Alcohol Abuse (Jim and Misko)

Each Theme Leader/s will have one hour to frame and present on their topic (identify and discuss key issues; generate key questions for small group discussion in the afternoon)

12:30 **Lunch**

2:00 **Small group discussion of themes**

Participants self-select into small groups to discuss the themes presented in the am. Each group treats a different theme.

3:15 Plenary—Conclusions/Recommendations from each theme group
4:00 Team activity

Thursday - 16/10/08

9:00 Professional/Technical Themes

- Mediation and its possible overlap with counselling (Petra)
- Cross-Cultural approaches to counselling (Henriette and Vicky)
- Interconnection between Stress and Depression (Dawn)
- Confidentiality around issues like sick leave and harassment (Duda)

Same format as Wednesday but with shorter presentations (approx. 45 minutes/topic) to identify and frame the four themes.

12:30 Lunch

2:00 Small group discussion of themes

Participants self-select into small groups to discuss the themes presented in the am. Each group treats a different theme.

3:15 Plenary—Conclusions/Recommendations from each theme group

4:00 Team activity

Friday – 17/10/08

9:00 Optional Sessions

(TBD from issues/ideas that emerge during the week)

**10:45 Formalization Process of SSCG and TORs revisited
(Coordinating Committee)**

Discussion and vetting of the TORs; building Member consensus and commitment.

12:00 Databases of Counsellors (Penelope)

12:30 Lunch

2:00 Report to the HR Network (Coordinating Committee)

Review of the requirements and agreement on how the report will be accomplished.

3:00 Reports on the SSCG Working Groups (Medical, etc.)

4:00 Elections for the Leadership of the SSCG

4:30 Meeting Adjourns

Appendix 2

SSCG 2008 Annual Meeting--Participant List

1. Kamran Ahmad, WFP
2. Moussa Ba, UNDSS
3. Ian Bates, WTO
4. Natalie Casalis, WHO
5. Kevin Cullen, ICTY
6. Penelope Curling, UNICEF
7. Henriette DeVries, WFP
8. Flavia Donanti, FAO
9. Elaine Duaman, UNMIS
10. Patience Gebauer, IAEA
11. Peninah Irungu, UNON
12. Petra Miczaika, WFP
13. Misko Mimica, UNHCR
14. Daniela Menes, UNHCR
15. Marieme Ndiaye, WFP
16. Jonas Nkwenfo, UNMIS
17. Vicki Owens, WFP
18. Lisa Pasquale, WIPO
19. Dawn Straiton, UN Secretariat
20. Jim Striker, World Bank
21. Duda Suzic, UNHCR
22. Jagoda Ungaro, UNHCR
23. Piet Van Gelder, MSF

Marsha Slater (Meeting Facilitator)