



Putting heads together

Better collaboration between traditional and biomedical health practitioners is needed to make holistic mental healthcare a reality.

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Access to mental health services in South Africa is relatively difficult, due to availability of human resources to cater for the population. The available treatment, at times, fails to include issues of culture and spirituality of the patients. Policymakers and health users in Africa have been calling for the inclusion of traditional healers into the health system in order to help the health system cope better with the burden of mental illnesses.

“Many pluralistic healthcare seekers in South Africa could benefit from accessing holistic and person-centred therapy for

their mental health issues,” says Ngcwalisa Jama.

Jama, a researcher from the University of the Western Cape, and her supervisors are in the process of investigating emerging collaboration practices between traditional and mental health practitioners. Gathering experiences of practitioners who have taken up the task of collaboration is an important step toward creating a model of collaboration that can be applied in the South African context.

“We need policymakers to take note of these collaboration endeavours and support them

so that they can be sustained and upscaled,” says Jama.

“With the inclusion of traditional health practitioners into the health system, we stand a chance of achieving the universal health goals, as they are key and respected healthcare providers in most communities.”

If collaborations cannot be unearthed and supported, we risk having the needs of around 70% of mental healthcare seekers who seek help from both systems, unmet.



Traditional healthcare should be incorporated into mental healthcare.