

MEDIA BRIEF

MENTAL HEALTH AUTHORITY PROCLAIMS THE MONTH OF MAY AS GHANA'S MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS CREATION MONTH (PURPLE MONTH)

The Mental Health Authority of Ghana, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and various mental health stakeholders, has proclaimed the month of May as Ghana's Mental Health Awareness Creation Month, dubbed **Purple Month**. This decision aligns Ghana with other nations such as the United States and the United Kingdom, which similarly designate May as a month dedicated to mental health awareness creation.

The decision to choose May holds significance for Ghana, considering the country's historical observance of World Mental Health Day on October 10th. Initially established in 1992 by the World Federation for Mental Health, this day aimed to raise global awareness of mental health issues and mobilize support for mental health initiatives. However, recognizing the inadequacy of a single day for mental health advocacy, the Mental Health Authority expanded the initiative to Mental Health Week and eventually to a month-long observance. Yet, this extension encountered challenges as October had already been designated as Breast Cancer Awareness Month, posing a conflict and diminishing the impact of mental health advocacy. Thus, the decision to shift the month-long observation to May was made to avoid such conflicts and enhance the effectiveness of mental health awareness efforts.

Mental Health Awareness Month, initiated by Mental Health America in 1949, serves as a model for Ghana's **Purple Month**. In the United States, May is observed with various activities such as media campaigns, local events, and film screenings, all aimed at increasing awareness of mental health importance and celebrating recovery from mental illness. Ghana seeks to emulate this model by utilizing May to raise awareness of mental health significance and wellness in the lives of Ghanaians. The objectives include combating stigma through public education, advocating for supportive policies, and celebrating recovery from mental illness.

Raising awareness during **Purple Month** not only reduces the stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness but also promotes mental well-being. Without treatment, mental health disorders can escalate, adversely affecting individuals and the nation as a whole. Furthermore, by incorporating mental fitness and proactive approaches to emotional health, Ghana aims to foster greater purpose, clarity, and enthusiasm in individuals' lives, ultimately contributing to national growth and productivity.

Why the Colour Purple

From a colour psychology perspective, purple promotes harmony of the mind and the emotions, contributing to mental balance, stability and peace of mind. The choice of the colour purple holds deep significance for Ghana's Mental Health Authority, as it has been the emblematic colour since its inception. Purple combines the calming stability of blue with the fierce energy of red, reflecting the wide variations in mental health conditions, including bipolar disorder. This blend symbolizes hope, support, and encouragement for individuals struggling with mental health conditions. Additionally, purple represents meanings of wealth, creativity, wisdom, dignity, devotion, peace, pride, and independence. Above all, it invokes a tranquil feeling that helps reduce stress and offers hope for self-actualization, achievement, and improved well-being.

The Significance of Purple Month

Mental health awareness is crucial for the holistic well-being of individuals across various dimensions of life. Unfortunately, stigma and lack of understanding often prevent people from seeking necessary help, leaving them isolated and reducing their life quality and productivity.

Purple Month seeks to change that by advancing mental health treatment and behavioural health education, foster dialogue, encourage proactive approaches to mental health, and ensure early intervention.

The theme for this year's celebration is: "**Movement: Moving More for Our Mental Health.**" In keeping with the Authority's mission to raise awareness among the general public, elevate the voices of mental health service users and caregivers, and fight for the rights and needs of individuals impacted, this month-long campaign exhorts people to include movement in their daily lives as a means of promoting mental wellness.

The chairperson reiterates this as "*a rallying cry that underscores the profound link between physical activity and mental well-being. Movement, in essence, signifies not just physical motion but also progress, transformation and growth.*"

In the realm of mental health, movement symbolizes our shared journey towards understanding, acceptance and support for those grappling with mental health challenges. Countless studies have underscored the transformative power of regular physical activity on our mood, stress levels and even the structure of our brains. It serves as a natural yet potent antidote to depression, anxiety, and stress.

Activities for the month-long celebrations include:

Week 1: Maternal Mental Health Week to raise awareness on the importance of maternal mental health and its numerous impact on family and communities.

Week 2: School Mental Health Awareness Programs to raise awareness among the youth on the importance of mental health education in their general development.

Week 3: Community Engagements with special focus on the Eastern Region.

Week 4: Engagements with Corporate Organizations for Workplace Mental Health Awareness creation.

Week 5: Health Walk and rounding up of Purple Month Activities.

In summary, Ghana's declaration of May as **Purple Month** signifies a significant step towards promoting mental health awareness and well-being in the nation. With more than 2.3 million Ghanaians experiencing some form of mental health disorders, education, and support for mental health advocacy is now more important than ever. By aligning with established initiatives such as Mental Health Awareness Month, Ghana aims to combat stigma, advocate for supportive policies, and celebrate recovery from mental illness.