

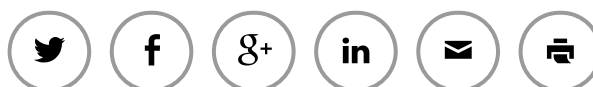


Jared Alden, a psychotherapist at the German Neuroscience Center in Dubai Healthcare City, is a member of an under-represented group of medical specialists in the UAE. Antonie Robertson / The National

Mental health deserves much more attention in the UAE

National Editorial

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Mental health issues are complex and often completely misunderstood, with this lack of awareness and understanding often compounded further by the paucity of assistance available. Changing this state of affairs will require a concerted effort but must be done.

The first task must be to break the taboo that surrounds mental health problems. Stigma and silence often stifles discussion of depression and associated illnesses. Secondly, we need to improve the country's mental health facilities. [As The National reported yesterday](#), experts say that more facilities, internationally recognised specialists and support groups are needed.

These same experts have also [called for a law](#) that regulates the profession to close the legal loopholes in the UAE that allow some unqualified practitioners to operate, with some doing more harm than good. This legislation would also serve to protect the rights of patients and mean that treatment for psychological disorders would be covered under health insurance. That this kind of treatment is not already covered by insurance is a strong indicator of how much and how urgently we need to develop our understanding of these complex issues.

Thirdly, the lack of home-grown specialists must also be addressed. As Justin Thomas, associate professor of psychology at Zayed University, [wrote](#)

in [The National this week](#), the best outcome for mental health problems comes from talk-based therapies but these require a deep understanding of the patient's culture. He noted with concern that few if any therapists with a profound understanding of local culture are in training.

The multicultural nature of the UAE means people sometimes struggle to find specialists who understand their language, thoughts and belief systems. Depression, for example, often responds to cognitive therapy – but that is less likely to be successful without the therapist's full understanding of the patient's background.

Research also suggests there are links between mental health and other illnesses that are over-represented in the UAE, such as diabetes, which shows the problems are more prevalent than initially thought. All this bolsters the need for more Emiratis to choose to work in the mental health sector.



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