

# Health Promotion for Torture and Trauma Survivors

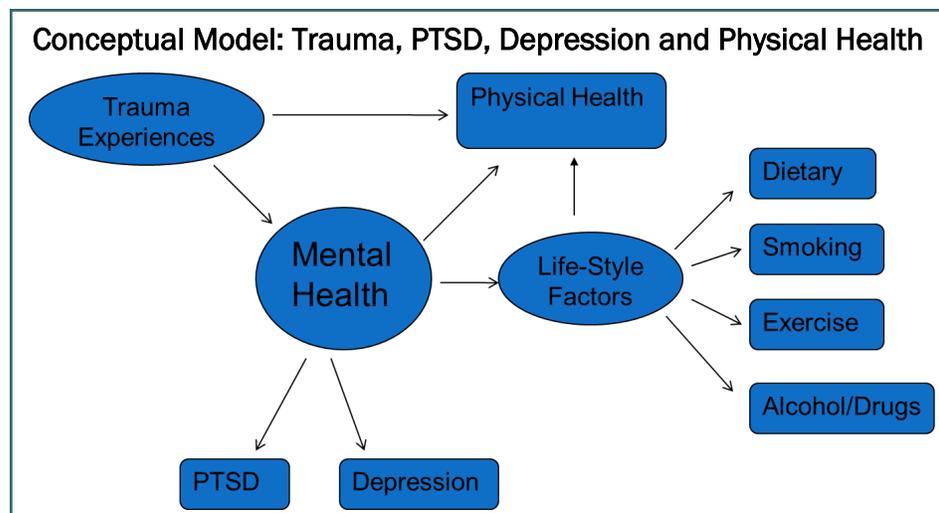
## What We Know:

- **Traumatic life experiences may have a serious impact on the health of an individual.**
- **Resettled refugees, IDPs, Immigrants and Asylees who have experienced extreme violence and torture are demonstrating serious chronic illness such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke and hypertension in countries of resettlement.**
- **Service providers' holistic responses should include diet and exercise programs just as attention is given to employment and education.**
- **There is growing scientific evidence between traumatic life experiences and chronic medical disorders:**
  - ACES study finds correlation between childhood trauma and household dysfunction in many of the leading causes of death in adults (lung disease, heart disease, stroke);
  - Harvard study finds significantly higher prevalence of diabetes in Cambodian population in comparison to general population;
  - Marshall et al report higher prevalence rate of psychiatric disorders in certain traumatized populations ;
  - Harvard study finds higher prevalence of developing liver, nasopharynx and stomach cancers in traumatized populations than general population.

## Importance of a Holistic Approach

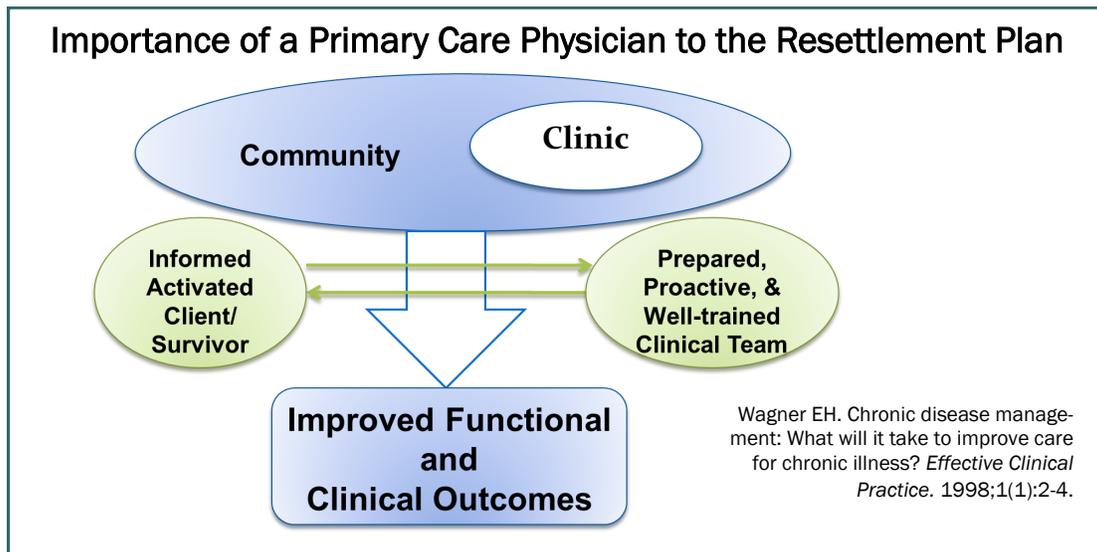
*"The healing of emotional wounds inflicted on mind and spirit by severe violence is also a natural process. Mind and body are powerfully linked, from the molecular up to the thoughts and social behaviors of a person. Mind and body are similarly interrelated in their potent curative influence. After violence occurs, a self-healing process is immediately activated, transforming, through physical and mental responses, the damage that has occurred to the psychological and social self."*

-Mollica, Richard F. "Healing Invisible Wounds: Paths to Hope and Recovery in a Violent World." Vanderbilt University Press, Nashville. 2006.



This information sheet is based on an NPCT webinar on this topic, presented by Richard Mollica, M.D., M.A.R., and Co-Founder of the Harvard Program in Refugee Trauma. The webinar was originally presented on September 28, 2011 and is archived on our website: [www.gcjfc.org/refugee](http://www.gcjfc.org/refugee) under [Webinars](#).





## WHY HEALTH PROMOTION?

- Extreme violence plants a seed that can grow into a debilitating illness. Prevention strategies and health promotion should always be top priorities because of the high prevalence of chronic disease in traumatized communities and individuals.
- Education programs and health promotion lead to increased focus on the importance of preventative care.
- Health literacy increases the individual's capacity to obtain, process and understand basic health information and services in order to make appropriate health decisions (Healthy People 2010).

## Health Promotion Curriculum Ideas

### 1. HEALTH

- ◇ What is health and why is it important?
- ◇ What can be done to prevent illness?
- ◇ There are no limitations to becoming healthy.

### 2. NUTRITION

- ◇ What is a balanced diet?
- ◇ How is processed food different than native foods found in homeland?
- ◇ What are good foods to eat and what should be avoided?
- ◇ What are the benefits and risks of traditional cooking?

### 3. EXERCISE

- ◇ How is the lifestyle in America different than at home?
- ◇ Why should we exercise?
- ◇ What are culturally acceptable methods of exercise?

### 4. STRESS REDUCTION, DEPRESSION AND CHRONIC DISEASE

- ◆ How can we reduce stress and self-regulate intense emotions?
- ◆ What is sleep hygiene?
- ◆ What is meditation and deep breathing?
- ◆ How is depression linked to chronic disease?

### 5. PRIMARY CARE

- ◆ How to talk to your doctor?
- ◆ The importance of a doctor/patient relationship
- ◆ The importance of medication instructions

### 2. GRADUATION

- ◆ Certificate
- ◆ Ceremony
- ◆ Award (ie: Gym membership)

# REFERENCES

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Dr. Richard Mollica is the Director of the Harvard Program in Refugee Trauma (HPRT) of Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School. He received his medical degree from the University of New Mexico and completed his Psychiatry residency at Yale Medical School. While at Yale he also trained in epidemiology and received a philosophy degree from the Divinity School.

In 1981, Dr. Mollica co-founded the Indochinese Psychiatry Clinic (IPC), one of the first clinical programs for refugees in the United States. Over the past two decades HPRT and IPC have pioneered the mental health care of survivors of mass violence and torture. HPRT/IPC's clinical model has been replicated throughout the world.



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NPCT is a training and technical assistance program which enhances awareness about the impact of political torture, and teaches skills to respond appropriately using trauma-informed care principles. It is a partnership of the Florida Center for Survivors of Torture (FCST), the Harvard Program in Refugee Trauma (HPRT) and the Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture (PSOT).