

The
health
of the public
in Northern Ireland



Report of the
Chief Medical Officer
2002



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Introduction

This year the main focus of my Report is the mental health and well-being of the people in Northern Ireland. Good mental health is something which should be valued by all of us. It impacts significantly on our sense of well-being and quality of life and affects how we view ourselves and others around us. Fortunately the majority of us enjoy good mental health, however, many do not.

Up to 300,000 of our population will at any one time be experiencing poor mental health. Coping with this places a major burden on the individual, their family and friends. It also impacts on society. A number of community projects have identified the specific needs of their people and have developed innovative ways in providing support. "Rural Support" developed by the Armagh and Dungannon Health Action Zone partnership provides an example of such a project in the farming industry.

Coping with a chronic disease or a significant illness can also affect our mental health. The importance of a patient-centred approach to care is well recognised and psychological support is an essential service for people with conditions such as cancer or a heart attack.

During the last year we were all faced with the emerging threat of bioterrorism. It is considered that appropriate safeguards and measures should be put in place to protect the health of the public from these potential threats. Plans are being put in place to ensure that we are prepared for such an event.

