The impact of mental illness is not limited to the patient but also extends to the family and friends of mental health patients. This implies that many people live with mental disorders unaware and undiagnosed, and therefore do not receive the correct treatment to deal with mental health and related challenges.

The Underestimated Prevalence of Mental Disorders in the Country
Although there is an increase globally in the reporting of the prevalence of mental disorders, there are views that the current burden is underestimated and the true picture is much more serious. Mental disorders often co-exist with other physical conditions where they are associated with considerable morbidity. This implies that often people complain about, and get treated for, a physical disorder when the problem is actually mental.

The Gaps in Mental Health Treatment Requirements
Research
Studies on the prevalence of some mental disorders are limited to pockets of communities and the available data does not cover the whole country. There is a lack of reliable, routinely collected data that can be used to plan services, which indicates an unmet need for mental health care.

Human and Financial Resources
South Africa, similar to other developing countries, faces serious challenges in providing adequate human resources to provide mental health services to its citizens, with such services chronically under-

Lack of Progress in Integration of Services
South Africa promotes the strengthening of the primary healthcare model for providing health services, however, this model has not been extended to mental healthcare services. Integration of mental healthcare services at primary health care facilities has not been fully realised. So far, it is limited at emergency management of psychiatric patients and not to the full spectrum of mental health services.

Model Used for the Treatment of Mental Disorders
The White Paper on the transformation of health in South Africa, issued in 1997, required that the training of health professionals shift towards prevention of disease and promotion of health, and not only focus on curative measures. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many institutions still base their training programmes on the curative approach.

The continued dominance of mental hospitals as a mode of service provision, as well as the current dominant model of treatment delivery, which uses individual psychotherapy, is unlikely to meet the current needs for mental services. This implies the need for a population mental health approach, which targets the population for screening, prevention, treatment and rehabilitation.

Stigma and Discrimination
Stigma and discrimination remain a serious barrier to help-seeking behaviour for both diagnosed and undiagnosed persons with mental illness. People with mental illness experience stigma from the community. However, the most despairing discrimination they receive comes from health services through failure to provide the needed resources to attend to their mental health needs.

Future Research
There is a need for continued studies on the types and prevalence of a range of mental disorders in South Africa. An example of a gap in research is a consideration that, although the last few years have seen an unprecedented increase in the use of psychoactive substances in general and nyaope in predominantly Black communities, there has not been corresponding propulsion of studies in this area. This despite the acknowledgement that the high prevalence of substance abuse brings challenges to mental health services in South Africa. Another unmet research need is in the increasing suicide rate in SA, which is a serious public health problem.

Your Contribution
Mental health awareness is necessary. There is something that each of us can do to reduce stigma against people with mental disorders, and assist in promoting positive help-seeking behaviour and even promote mental well-being.