Reflections on the 1st International Mental Health Development Conference

The 1st International Mental Health Development Conference held in October last year was an opportunity for cross-sectoral debate on issues of critical significance to global mental health.

This event will be remembered as a foundation stone for a vital network dedicated to mental health development across the region.

International leaders and regional experts came together to focus on the work embodied in the development efforts of the iMHLP Fellows.

In total, the Conference brought together delegates from 14 nations with leading experts from the World Health Organization (WHO), Harvard Medical School, Eli Lilly and Company, AusAID, the University of Geneva, and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

The centrepiece of the conference was the body of development work undertaken by iMHLP Fellows themselves, where the outcomes in terms of policy and services was influential, providing a solid foundation for future Fellows of the program.

The Fellows presented reports on issues such as the introduction of community-based care in Vietnam, alternative models of care in Malaysia, integrating mental health into family and reproductive healthcare in China, and the plight of 1.3 million internal refugees in Indonesia, of which 70 per cent are women and children in dire need of screening, referral and support.
Celebrating their work, Dr John Heiligenstein, Medical Advisor to the Global Neuroscience Division of Eli Lilly, said the iMHLP Fellows tapped into key quality-of-life issues and programs that enhance compliance, and would leave an indelible impression for future Fellows of the program.

The efforts of the 2002 iMHLP Fellows to build something new, to make changes, to work with governments and to unfold planned changes, was clearly evident.

As the first of the iMHLP Fellows, this group will now become the Alumni of a growing program that ties together many different streams – perspectives from anthropology, transcultural psychiatry, population health, economics, and many others.