Taking science into society

Srinivasa SRR Yerramilli
Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, Institute of Mental Health, Osmania Medical College, Hyderabad, India

Sir,

Knowledge that is not useful to common man makes no social sense. The ultimate goal of science should be “a better/happier society”. I read with interest the article of Korada on “Loka-kalyan and the community of psychiatrists”. It is an eye-opener for many of the mental health professionals who confine themselves just to consultation chambers / research rooms / libraries. The word “doctor” means a “teacher”. A doctor is a teacher to the wider community.

The health care system in our country needs to take a U-turn, from being illness/disease-focused and tubular, to being health oriented, with a wider vision. This would help the system grow, as health and development go together. In a nutshell, the aim of the health care system should be to “make the society healthier, with sharper minds and stronger bodies which can contribute to individual and social development”. This can be achieved only when all the health care activities like research, training, patient care, work in this direction aiming at the "welfare of the mankind/universal welfare" or Loka-kalyan (good of every one).

When mental health professionals become social centred, this would break the barrier between the society and the mind specialists. This is the one and only solution for the "stigma" which is haunting the field of mental health for centuries together. It is always welcomed when we talk about "health" more than "disease". People will listen if we talk about making their "minds stronger" than just about schizophrenia.

Our training/research needs reforms and should focus more on "preventive and promotional aspects." How "not to become a psychotic or get depressed, how to overcome problems of day to day living, how to escape from getting addicted to alcohol or smoking, how to stand unaffected by the risk factors and dangers in the present day society" are all the questions that need answers. This would reduce the enormous burden of managing the mental illnesses to the individual and to the nation.

Many evils in the society like violence and terrorism, crime, suicide, homicide have their roots in the minds of the people. Strategies should be built to address developing better communicational, emotional, social skills (emotional intelligence) from childhood itself.

Mental health professionals should be trained in addressing the normal day to day problems of life. The professionals should venture more with the media and take the prime responsibility of spreading the message of mental health without giving chance for the unqualified to dominate in the roles.

Another important responsibility of psychiatrists is to spread a positive image about psychiatry. Psychiatry is not about just dealing with the 29% of dishevelled psychotic patients wandering in the streets, but, is much more than that. Psychiatry can be made a less threatening and more attractive subject if we start dealing with the common mental disorders and common day to day problems of life. This is not possible in the old stigmatized confinements - “mental hospitals” and there is a need to integrate with the community and medical field.

World Health Organization (WHO) has clearly emphasized the need for developing guidelines for media while reporting suicides and other sensitive matters related to mental health. These need to be developed by the Indian government at the earliest. Glamorization of suicide by media can at no cost be accepted / allowed. Also, powerful and popular film-stars appearing on the media (movies, television, others) with cigarettes, alcohol and other drugs (indirect advertisement) should be punished/banned. Acts like COTPA (Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act) need to be implemented strictly.

Another area that needs to be addressed is the enormous pressure some of the present corporate schools and colleges are putting on the students. Students are losing their creativity. There are many examples wherein students developed mental illnesses or attempted suicide, being unable to bear the pressure at these centres. It is not at all justified for these centres to use unfortunate children as tools for their business gains. Unless this is condemned by professional bodies the fate of the students will be at stake.

In Andhra Pradesh, India, the practice of psychiatry by unqualified people is definitely an issue. There are many instances where quacks (unqualified people) are deceiving...
person with mental illness in the name of treatment. They are making money out of people's ignorance. Psychiatric societies / bodies should break their silence and come to the rescue of these patients.

Also, many quacks, magicians, and other unqualified people are making their appearance on televisions / print media to talk / write about stress and mental health. This is happening unfortunately even in reputed newspapers. Even this issue needs to be seriously addressed.

There are programmes in television and other media wherein these unqualified people are interviewing patients live and giving advice (whatever comes to their mind) to them in front of millions of viewers. Showing the patients live on media and branding them in front of millions of viewers is highly unethical and a breach of confidentiality. The scientific bodies / psychiatric associations cannot be tight lipped on these matters. Judicial help needs to be sought for to immediately stop such programs.

Being silent is also a crime. I hope the community of psychiatrists would take up their role towards the citizens of India.

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References


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