

Presidential Address

MENTAL HEALTH CARE IN KERALA- THE WAY FORWARD

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I am very much delighted and honoured to address this august body as the President of Branch of Indian Psychiatric Society, Kerala. Taking over the reins from Dr Varghese P. Punnoose, a seasoned leader and academician is yet another privilege worth mentioning. IPS Kerala State Branch has been going through a phase of remarkable change in the recent past, streamlining the activities with, vibrant and dynamic office bearers at the helm, supported by very right-minded and proactive Executive Committee. I congratulate the outgoing team led by Dr Varghese P. Punnoose and the dynamic Secretary Dr Radhakrishnan M.P. for scaling new heights of achievement. I assure that I will try my best to see that the journey goes on smoothly and productively.

As we all know, Kerala has recently been devastated by flood and landslides, and much attention has been drawn to the psychological impact on those most affected. The society and the Government need of professional support more than ever, and we have already embarked on such measures, and have been continuing our sincere effort by training mental health professionals, reaching out to those needy and giving psychological first aid. We must sustain the service activities that are going on and plan for the future course of actions. Hence, in the coming year, IPS is planning to take up the responsibility along with other associations in training mental health professionals of the affected areas in the management of Mental

Health Care issues related with disasters. Considering the prevailing scenario, we have included Disaster Mental Health Care as a separate session in the academic deliberations.

One of the major challenges that we face now is the issues related to the implementation of the Mental Health Care Act 2017. A bunch of problems that are detrimental to the clinicians need to be addressed. A petition has already been filed before the Court by IPS to defer the implementation of the Act until the Govt. constitutes the District level Review Boards and State Level Authority.

We shall be vigilantly following up the legal proceedings. The Government should formulate rules consistent with Central Act, in consultation with Indian Psychiatric Society, so that the hurdles that we anticipate in treating persons with mental illness can be resolved at least to some extent.

Yet another major challenge in managing chronic mental illness is poor drug compliance and subsequent relapses. At this juncture, I would like to compliment the good effort by our colleagues in the District Mental Health Programme. Govt should take appropriate steps to strengthen the existing system to ensure adequate and regular supply of quality medicines without shortages at any time through the outreach clinics. The existing Psychiatry Units of District Hospitals need to be upgraded with more infrastructure facilities and

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enough qualified Mental Health professionals. It is a sad fact that the brunt of chronic mental illness is mainly borne by the patient's family members, who are also struggling to make their ends meet. Govt run halfway homes and rehabilitation centers is a necessity at the moment, as it is a challenging task to reintegrate persons with chronic illness into the community and make them productive.

The emerging issues related to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Care is another area of concern. As a preliminary step, we have conducted a workshop for teachers on Child and Adolescent Mental Health Problems as a pre-conference workshop. Education Department should take up this sensitising training programme and conduct periodic counselling sessions at every school as an ongoing project. IPS will provide all necessary support for the same. Necessary modifications should be made in the curriculum to include topics which will promote positive physical and mental health in children.

Unscientific and fraudulent treatment practices that flourish in our otherwise literate State are also adding up to the hardships faced by the Mental Health Care Delivery System. This leads to delay in initiating treatment, health problems getting more worse, and more than that, syphoning away huge amounts of money from patients and their families. Dissemination of scientific knowledge in the society through various media is one of the ways of preventing this hazard: I am happy that our media-friendly members are doing a very good effort in this regard and request more members to join this stream. It is highly recommended that the Govt. takes appropriate legal steps to curb such practices by quacks, thereby preventing the exploitation of patients and their families.

As I stand before you as the newly installed President, I remember with gratitude my parents and other family members, my illustrious teachers, colleagues and friends who had been instrumental in moulding me. I take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to the Organizing Committee Chairman Dr N.S. Jinen, Secretary Dr Alfred V. Samuel, President of Kollam Psychiatric Society Dr Radhakrishnan M.P and Secretary Dr Ramesh Chandran and all other members of the organizing committee. I also extend my sincere gratitude to those who contributed in cash and kind and helping to make this event happen.

Long Live IPS, Thank You.