

Presidential address

YOUR MENTAL HEALTH - YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

Dr Thomas John^{1*}

¹President, the Branch of Indian Psychiatric Society, Kerala & National Chairperson, the Taskforce for Disability Act and Certification Guidelines

*Corresponding address: Kuttichirayil, Subash Mandir Road, Near Petta Metro Station, Ernakulam-682038.
Email; drthomasjohn@gmail.com

Respected President Dr Harish MT, distinguished Chief Guest Dr Abraham Varghese, President I M A Kerala State Branch, esteemed past leaders of the society, my bellowed teachers, senior members, fellow members, members of the press, ladies, and gentlemen,

I am honoured and delighted to be here and humbled by the faith you all have reposed in me and electing unanimously and directly without being a vice president, as the 36th President of IPS Kerala state branch. Thirty-six years ago, the first conference of our prestigious state branch was held in this historical city of Kochi in a hall of Lourde Hospital with 28 psychiatrists which is much more than today's gathering in person. Professor James T Antony and Dr S.D Singh were the first president and secretary. Much water has flowed under the bridge, and the big fat conferences have shrunk in size all over the world due to the unexpected pandemic. We also adopted the 'New Normal' way to see that every constitutional responsibility of our association is completed in time. The outgoing team, under the leadership of Prof. Harish, left no stone unturned to make every constitutional activity are done in time. COVID -19 accelerated the digital revolution and hundreds of our members, including key office bearers, are viewing this ceremony from their office missing our social gathering, which is inevitable for our wellbeing.

COVID-19 AND MENTAL HEALTH

The virus SARS-CoV-2 which started its journey from China in November 2019 affected people all over the world and being a pandemic, we have to suffer the impact and lead a careful living for a few more months.

Even though it is a physical illness, the social, economic and mental health issues related to this pandemic is unimaginable and it will last for a few more years. Many of our patients with mental illness who were stable with or without medication showed signs of relapse. New cases of mental illness were reported among those who are genetically vulnerable in different forms like phobia, obsession, depression, mania and psychosis. More number of suicides in various age groups are reported.

Every day in print and social media, we witness mental health issues related to COVID -19. Let me quote a few of such reports. The Bollywood celebrities like Amitabh Bachan, Mohena, Shrenu Parikh and Additi Gupta, who were affected with the virus, had different reactions to this illness. "A pariah syndrome driving COVID patients into depression and loneliness- Amitabh." "I felt like an alien whom nobody wanted to speak with - Mohina Kumari. "The stigma attached with the disease is such a big problem that people are scared of admitting that they are COVID positive - Shrenu Parikh", "It does take a toll on your mental health - Additi Gupta". "Uncertainty, loss of income, job-related pressure and COVID related fears took a toll on mental health - TOI". All these show the public awareness and the role of psychiatrists and other mental health professionals in times of stress from any source.

NATIONAL CRIME RECORDS BUREAU REPORTS-2019

The report of NCRB 2019 on suicide in Kerala should be an eye-opener for our policymakers. Kerala recorded the fifth highest suicide rate of 24.3 per lakh (8566 persons) well above all India rate of 10.2. Our state does

Access the article online:

<https://kiponline.com/index.php/kip/article/view/219>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30834/KJP.33.2.2020.219>

Received: 4/10/2020. Web publication: 19/10/2020

QR Code



How to cite the article: John T. Your mental health - your responsibility (presidential address). Kerala Journal of Psychiatry 2020, 33(2):93-95

not have a proper suicide prevention policy. Bio-psycho-social factors have to be adequately addressed. Most of the time, the public go after the causative issues, which is more sensational than scientific. A psychological autopsy than a police enquiry is the need of the hour in such situations. Except in impulsive acts, the role of depression has to be emphasized. The role of serotonin, a neurotransmitter which elevates mood and creates a feeling of wellbeing should not be ignored. The fundamental thing is to develop resilience, i.e., the ability to withstand adversities of life in adolescents and adults. Whatever may be the cause, spending time and listening patiently to persons with suicidal intent has a definite role. In Kerala, we have a few such centres run by NGOs under the guidance of our member Psychiatrists. I hope more such centres will come in the near future wherever it is lacking.

WORLD HAPPINESS REPORT 2020

India's position in the World Happiness Report (March) 2020 is 144th, worse than our neighbouring countries and it is steadily worsening since 2013. Determinants of wellbeing are closely related to mental health. You might have noted the active discussion in our e-ips group where the majority of our seniors mentioned the need of bringing it to the attention of health policymakers.

ALCOHOL, PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCE AND CYBER ABUSE

The abuse and addiction of the above three things is a growing social and mental health issue which we are facing. These three entities spoil many adolescents and energetic youths. It is a challenging issue, and we have to take proper steps for harm reduction from them.

TELEMEDICINE AND PSYCHIATRY

Modes of health care delivery are evolving, and telepsychiatry is a major mode at present. In the year 2004 telemedicine service started in General Hospital Ernakulam, for the first time in Kerala under Government to help patients of Lakshadweep where speciality services were lacking. At that time, the GPs of Lakshadweep hospitals brief the history and relevant points, and I used to recommend medications and proper psychoeducation. Our challenge is to reach the unreached, and now rules are relaxed, and it is directly between the patient and doctor. Dear members, unless

we change, we do not grow and use it as per rules.

TACKLING CHALLENGES

We are facing several challenges apart from above problems in our daily practice. The contradicting sections of IPC, MHC Act, RPWD Act, Clinical Establishment Act, Consumer Protection Act etc. are a few of them. Elaborating them in this presidential address is beyond the scope as it needs wider discussion. MHCA 2017 is not a solution for everything that is encountered in the course of Psychiatric Practice. There are 21 specified disabilities in the RPwD act 2016, but all except SLD have a scale which helps to quantify in percentage. The existing and the forthcoming scales from NIMHANS Bengaluru do not quantify SLD. Without a quantifying scale, how can the authorities insist on medical officers to mention forty per cent disability for SLD. Such an action may unnecessarily lead to litigation. Inclusion of Psychiatrists in SLD board is recommended and forwarded from the ministry of Social Justice but not yet approved by Law Dept. Stigma to mental illness is yet another challenge.

THE WAY FORWARD

'All things are difficult before they become easy'—Thomas Fuller. We have to go ahead with proper psychoeducation to the public, policymakers, officials, other professional groups and various stakeholders. Improvement of infrastructure and more fund allocation for the cause of mental health is the need of the hour. Dr Daniels, President of World Federation of Mental Health in her advance message for the World Mental Health Day October 10th, 2020 says 'during this time more than ever greater investment in mental health is needed to ensure that everyone, everywhere has access to mental health care to deliver mental health for all'. Stigma reduction to mental illness is possible only by giving dignity in mental health. WFMH, through its slogan of the year 2015, gave novel ideas to tackle the stigma related to mental illness. I translated that description to Malayalam in the form of a handbook in 2016. This book describes how people, like any other illness, accept breast cancer which was a stigmatizing illness in the nineteen seventies.

ACTION PLAN FOR THE ASSOCIATION YEAR
Rights of the people go hand in hand with responsibilities. Hence, we choose the Slogan "Your

Mental Health is Your Responsibility” by which an individual is helped to develop positive mental health by himself. The five warning signs of mental illness viz; 1) long-lasting sadness or irritability, 2) extremely high and low moods, 3) excessive fear, worry, or anxiety, 4) social withdrawal, 5) dramatic changes in eating or sleeping habits (newroadstreatment.org) as followed in some developed nations to educate the public can be applied for public awareness here also. We will continue with the actions taken by the previous team

CONCLUSION

My humble submission to this august body to have a critical appraisal of these matters and guide us. I would

like to conclude with a maxim that I follow in my life. “Do not walk in front of me; I may not follow. Do not walk behind me; I may not lead you. Do not walk away from me; I need you. Let us walk together. This ‘new normal way’ of installation will be remembered forever in the history of our society due to its simplicity and the change in mode.

Jai IPS, Jai Hind

Delivered at the 36th annual conference (SIPSCON, 2020) of the branch of Indian Psychiatric Society (Kerala), Ernakulam, October 4th, 2020.