

Presidential Address

MHCA-2017: CHANGING KNOWLEDGE INTO PRACTICE – NEED OF THE HOUR

Delivered at 39th Annual Conference of the Branch of Indian Psychiatric Society, Kerala (SIPSCON) 2023 on 9th September 2023

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Respected Immediate Past President of the Branch of Indian Psychiatric Society (IPS) Kerala, Dr. Alfred V Samuel; Chief Guest, Dr. James T Antony; Guest of Honor, Dr. K A Kumar; Hon. General Secretary, Dr. Joice Geo; Hon. Treasurer, Dr. Aneez Ali; Hon. Editor, Dr. Indu P.V.; other office-bearers and executive committee members; ladies and gentlemen; good evening to all of you.

I thank all the members of IPS Kerala for unanimously electing me as the president of the Branch for the year 2023-24. I stand before you today with a heart filled with gratitude and humility as I express my sincere thanks to each one of you. It is an honor to address you as the newly elected president of the Indian Psychiatric Society Kerala State Branch.

First and foremost, I extend my deepest gratitude to my esteemed colleagues for bestowing me the responsibility of leading this organization. Your trust and confidence in me mean the world, and I pledge to uphold the principles and values that the Indian Psychiatric Society stands for. I would also like to acknowledge the contributions of my predecessors and the entire team that has worked tirelessly to strengthen our society.

My journey with the Indian Psychiatric Society

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has been a fulfilling one. Serving as an executive committee member and as the secretary of this esteemed organization for two terms has given me valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities we face in psychiatry. It has also allowed me to witness the unwavering commitment of our members to improving mental healthcare in Kerala.

As the president, I have some responsibilities and goals that I would like to share with you.

IPS, being a scientific society and a professional body, my priority is to ensure that regular academic programs are conducted to keep us updated with the latest trends in this field. We plan to organize CMEs and conferences on various psychiatry topics, covering clinical and research aspects.

My second priority is to strengthen our branch's organizational structure and functioning. I plan to improve the communication and coordination among the office bearers, executive committee members, and general members. I also intend to increase the membership and participation of our branch, especially among young psychiatrists and postgraduate students.

As a society for promoting scientific practice, we had declared our stand against

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the abolishment of unscientific practices like conversion therapy. We shall oblige to follow the IPS position statement in this respect.¹ Previous presidents of the IPS Kerala Branch had started programs for suicide prevention and the prevention of behavioral addictions in the younger generation in our state.^{2,3} We shall follow up on these initiatives with the help of local guilds in all districts.

Apart from all these, it is customary that every president puts forward some new activity that is most relevant for the coming year. I think the most crucial task before us as professionals is to tune our practice under the requirements of the Mental Healthcare Act (MHCA) 2017.⁴

Apart from negative human rights like freedom from torture and discrimination, MHCA 2017 assures several positive human rights to the patient, including free access to mental healthcare, right to community living, right to equality, right to information, confidentiality, and right to legal aid.^{4,5} Mostly, all of these remain in print only. If fully implemented, it can be a game-changer in the care of mentally ill persons. Though the Act became the 'law of the land' five years ago, the administration is dragging its feet in implementing it. Nonetheless, we must comply with it.

IPS conducted several debates, discussions, CMEs, and workshops on MHCA 2017 in the past decade. We all are knowledgeable about the Act and the changes it brings. However, this knowledge needs to be translated into a change in our clinical practice. That should be done before the Mental Health Review Board (MHRB) starts functioning.

The MHCA 2017 is a right-based legislation. The rules are also in place. They stipulate the steps to be taken to protect the rights of persons with mental illness. Usually, we do what we think is best for our patients. Nevertheless, that is not enough. We need to follow certain procedures and protocols.^{5,6} All staff in our MHEs should know their role and be trained to implement those changes

successfully. We need a change in the system by implementing new processes, protocols, and procedures.

We plan an online interactive course to help update and train ourselves, mental health professionals, counselors, nurses, and other hospital staff. The course will include readily usable forms and charts. It will also have offline classes and sessions like mock MHRB meetings.

As we progress, I am committed to working collaboratively with all of you. Together, we can achieve our shared vision of promoting mental health awareness, improving access to quality psychiatric care, and reducing the stigma associated with mental illness.

In conclusion, I am excited about the journey ahead and look forward to working with each one of you to advance the cause of mental health in Kerala. I also want to express my gratitude to our members, without whom the Indian Psychiatric Society would not be what it is today.

Thank you once again for this incredible opportunity and your unwavering support. Let us move forward with determination and compassion, knowing that our work can transform lives. Let us embark on this new chapter together.

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