

SHORT COMMUNICATION

MULTI-SECTORIAL COLLABORATION FOR AWARENESS ON MENTAL HEALTH

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Recently one of the authors had the privilege to collaborate with a Non-government organization (NGO) “Sneham” by moderating the panel discussion on ‘Mental Health Matters’. It shed light on the issue from various perspectives. The panel discussion centered around the social-psychological impact of mental health issues and the need to develop multi-sectorial collaboration to help troubled teens. The speakers included representatives from the public sector, rescue team, volunteer from an NGO and law regularities.

The aim of the panel discussion was to create awareness about mental health issues. Moreover, since 1949 the month of May has been observed as “mental health awareness month” in the USA, reaching millions of people through media, social events and screenings.

All the speakers were directly or indirectly involved with the socio-psychological impact of mental health matters and gathered under one roof for the noble cause to develop multifactorial collaboration to help people in need. Each of them gave an insight into the issue from a different perspective and shared first-hand information based on own experiences.

The first speaker, a public representative in effect a common man and a successful professional today was once a victim himself a decade ago. Today, he has many awards to his

credit. As he shared his inspiring journey from being a victim to victor and his breakthrough to excellence, he opened up to say that he had to suffer stigmatization, segregation, rejection and ridicule. He struggled to rise above all these and sought medical help. He gives credit to his close family members and volunteers from an NGO who provided emotional support just by lending a shoulder and being patient listeners, he added. Likewise, ‘a study on the role of the family in recovery and major depression’ showed a clear association between family functioning and recovery from major depression¹.

Second speaker from the rescue team shared the rescue team hardships and experiences. The rescue teams’ best efforts are sometimes futile and even the success of the successful survivors depends on the quality of life thereafter. The rescue team members are even keen to acquire knowledge and learn skills to provide emotional support and additional help where needed. Sometimes they themselves get emotionally disturbed and need mental health support services.

Likewise, a study done in paediatric residents concluded that programmes should increase awareness of mental health services and mental health support for the professionals as well².

Severe psychological shock can result in persistent mental and emotional stress

affecting all spheres of one's life ranging from sleep, general behaviour and attitude to daily activities including work. There is persistent recurrent and vivid recall of the experience that render the victim's mental and social responses. The next speaker had close association with such unfortunate experiences. He was called the 'hero' of the panel discussion (by the audience) as he selflessly forgetting his pains came out of his comfort zone to express in words his bitter experience for this noble cause of creating awareness about mental health. He has found happiness in helping others. A study published in psychology journal 'Emotion' aimed to figure out the benefits of helping others and surprisingly the results added to the growing literature supporting the benefits of pro-social behaviour. People striving for happiness may be tempted to treat themselves. However, the results of the study suggested that they could be more successful if they opt to treat someone else instead³.

Malaysian law penalizes suicide (under penal code 309), whoever attempts to commit suicide or does any act towards the commission of such offence shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend up to one year or fine or both⁴. The panel discussion also had the distinguished speaker from the police department to shine light into the legal aspect of the issue. 'Suicide epidemic is a concern', an article in 'The Star Online' last year pointed out that it is disturbing dangerous rampant phenomena permeating all strata of Malaysian society. The statistics tends to underplay the actual number. However, the youth suicide rate is twice the national average. Some of the various reasons being deprivation and loneliness, serious personal crisis and loss, family issues, chronic pain and terminal issues,

alcohol and drug abuse, social exclusion and cultural behaviours⁵.

The actions need to be taken starting from the grass root level by creating awareness of the importance of effective mental health care, identifying people at risk and providing the necessary support.

Government and non-government organization's work engaged in this critical area is tremendously remarkable. The last speaker proved to be a blessing to the affected people. He served as a volunteer in an NGO for 45 years and to his credit has the privilege of saving numerous lives by being there as a patient listener on phone for them in their toughest times and when they had nobody to listen to. The volunteers of such organizations provide an empathetic listening heart. There are such various esteemed NGOs and volunteers who are doing wonderful work by helping people in need. Volunteerism itself gives immense satisfaction and has mental and physical benefits as well⁶.

It was a breath-taking and enriching experience to listen to the panelists from different walks of life collaborating for a common cause. Each panelist had a role to play and a different perspective to highlight. Each one of them left a mark on the audience in its unique way by the role each one had played in the lives of the affected. It motivated every individual in the audience to create awareness and reaching out with the empathetic heart as we fight this battle against mental health issues. To conclude, all of us irrespective of our professions should join hands and try our best in all spheres to take notice of the circumstances and situations that lead to such grave ends. The empathetic patient attention at the right time can change situations.

References

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