

The mental health Team

Tackling severe mental illnesses is only a part of the entire spectrum of mental health. Ensuring that people deal with their day-to-day problems of living and still maintain the rhythm of personality development, is another important aspect.

Alleviating symptoms of mental ill health is considered domain of a 'clinical psychiatrist'. Traditionally this 'hard psychiatry' deals with psychotropic medicines and electro-convulsive therapy. Diagnosis of a disorder by eliciting relevant signs is an important part of clinical psychiatry. The acutely symptomatic cases do require prompt relief and this branch of mental health can provide this. This area can also get enriched if a team works here. The team approach however becomes essential in dealing with 'soft psychiatry'.

There are so many 'psychological problems' that people of various age groups can have and yet they are not 'disordered'. Students can have problems of learning, youth can have problems in setting goals, middle aged people can face stagnancy and yearn for change, senior citizens may find very difficult to change. All such people need a caring professional help. It cannot be called 'treatment' by the traditional definition.

A child with learning difficulties benefits by inputs from a special educationist. Families of people suffering from schizophrenia need attention from a clinical psychologist. Same is true with schizophrenia afflicted people after their symptoms come under control. A teenager can open up in front of a counselor with a background of medical social work or family and child welfare. A youth can get vocational guidance from a counseling psychologist. A speech therapist and an occupational therapist can work together with a hyperactive child with complaints of unclear speech. A person with poor work record, a case of absenteeism, can derive strength from an industrial psychologist. Students with examination tension can learn a few ways of concentration from an educational psychologist. The dietician, the yoga and relaxation therapist as well as trained hypnotherapist can also make the team as balanced and omnipotent as the current Australian cricket team.

There are many advantages of working in a team. The interdisciplinary approach renders the client more effective and holistic help. In case a client heeds opinions and inputs of different experts it can be arranged either simultaneously or sequentially. The team members learn from each other's experience. The team approach increases the reach and depth of a mental health initiative. Even financially the team method can be more effective than a solo effort.

And when it comes to imparting 'psycho-education', a very important part of 'mental health movement' the team is indispensable. The team can handle community-based seminars, workshops and can craft different training modules for different age groups of people.

In such an initiative, an enlightened and trained community volunteer can also become a team member. In fact, in a country like ours, this force can give real teeth to such initiatives. Involvement of non-professionals signifies another important fact.... The community has started feeling that mental health is really an issue of concern.

In addition to those involved in the mental health team, it requires a back up of well wishers and activists to chip in at right slots, at right times. This is a very important asset when it comes to changing perceptions of the community vis-à-vis mental health & mental illnesses.

Finally, unless the recipient of the care becomes an integral part of the team, even the most efficient team will not be able to achieve elegant success. When a former recipient becomes advocate of the cause of mental health, it speaks not only of his health but also of the health of the entire team that helped.