Press Release

Autism, a highly misdiagnosed condition in India

Patience and love along with therapy can a child and families and children cope with this condition

New Delhi, 04 July 2017: According to a recently conducted study, 1 in 89 Indian children between 2 and 9 years of age are diagnosed with autism. As many as 2.2 million children and 13 million people in the country live with this condition. It is alarming to note that while the cases of autism are showing an upward trend in India, there is not much awareness about this condition. There is also much stigma associated with autism in India.

The signs and symptoms of autism can be observed in the first three years of a child itself. This condition is the outcome of a neurological disorder which affects normal brain function, communication, and social interaction skills in children. Although the exact cause of this disorder is not known, research points to a combination of genetic and environmental factors.

Speaking about this, Padma Shri Awardee Dr K K Aggarwal, National President Indian Medical Association (IMA) and President Heart Care Foundation of India (HCFI) and Dr RN Tandon – Honorary Secretary General IMA in a joint statement, "Autism is a highly misdiagnosed condition in India. Many still treat children with autism as abnormal and mentally deranged and therefore, diagnosis gets delayed further. The earlier it is diagnosed, the better it is for the child. In children with this disorder, certain information processed by the brain is sent out in the form of signals that are just noise for him/her. Autistic children find it difficult to distinguish vital signals from this noise. The brain develops differently in autistic children and some are brilliant in few things although they may be unable to communicate as effectively as others. While an autistic child may be unable to speak clearly, he may turn out to be excellent in something else."

The Indian government now recognizes autism as a disability. Although autism was thought to be incurable till late, there have been improvements and therapies such as art therapy have been found to help this condition somewhat.

Adding further, Dr Aggarwal, said, "There is no single line of treatment for children with autism. A treatment approach that encompasses addressing social, language, and behavioral difficulties is the key. Parental and family support is highly important in treating such children. It is a good idea for parents and other members of the family to learn how to interact with them in ways that promote
social interaction skills, manage problem behaviors, and teach daily living skills and communication. Certain medications are also prescribed for hyperactive children."

Life is not very easy with an autistic child. There may be new challenges every day. However, it is important to acknowledge the condition and accept it. Celebrating every accomplishment of your child however small it may be, have a lot of patience, love them unconditionally, and put in consistent effort. Here are some tips for parents of children with autism.

- Be aware and focus on the positive Autistic children, just like others, respond to positive reinforcement. Praise them for any small milestone they achieve and for any other good behavior they exhibit.
- Give it time Nothing works overnight and this is true of therapy and treatment as well. Do not get discouraged if your child does not respond to a certain line of therapy.
- Get support Try and look around for similar groups of parents as this will help you share advice and get support on various aspects.

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About IMA: Indian Medical Association is the only representative, national voluntary organization of Doctors of Modern Scientific System of Medicine, which looks after the interest of doctors as well as the well being of the community at large. It has its Headquarter in Delhi and State / Terr. Branches in 30 States and Union Territories. It has over 2, 60,000 doctors as its members through more than 1765 active local branches spread across the country.

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