Mental disorders manifesting as a silent killer among Indian population

Need to act against the social stigma and prejudice associated with the disorder

New Delhi, 17 June 2017: According to recent statistics, about 7.5% of Indians suffer from major or minor mental disorders requiring expert intervention. About 56 million in the country suffer from depression and another 38 million suffer from anxiety disorders. What further exacerbates this situation is the lack of resources, dearth of trained health-care providers, and social stigma associated with mental disorders.

Depression is characterized by sadness, loss of interest or pleasure, feelings of guilt or low self-worth, disturbed sleep or appetite, feelings of tiredness, and poor concentration. On the other hand, anxiety disorders include generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), panic disorder, phobias, social anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

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, said, "Mental illnesses are as serious or probably more serious than any other illness. They too have a biological basis. The same way as cancers develop due to both external and internal factors, so do mental illnesses. Under prolonged stress, the brain desperately searches for ways to relieve the pressure. In the absence of an effective coping mechanism or a good support system, people tend to sink deeper into negative thoughts and behaviours which in turn can affect even daily functioning. The situation is grim in India today with people who are depressed not correctly diagnosed or misdiagnosed and prescribed anti-depressants to treat the problems without understanding the real factors."

Research indicates that women are more prone to mental disorders due to factors such as gender discrimination, early marriage, domestic violence, and rapid social change. Some of the common modes of treatment for mental disorders include psychotherapy, medication, hospitalization, peer support, and access to a support group.

Adding further, Dr Aggarwal, said, "There is an urgent need to act against the stigma and prejudice associated with mental disorders in India. Depression can be prevented and treated if recognized in time. IMA's campaign called 'Bar Bar Pucho' aims at removing this very stigma. The campaign urges doctors to ask the patient 'If he is ok' at each visit and not just focus on writing a prescription."
Doctors should check on the mental wellbeing of the patient including mood, depression, alcohol use, smoking habits, drug abuse, and sexual needs and preferences during every visit. Listening without any preconceived notions or bias will foster trust and help the patient to open up about his/her problems, which itself can be therapeutic.

Here are some simple steps to avoid the risk of acquiring mental disorders.

- Consume a healthy diet
- Get regular exercise
- Avoid stress
- Discuss your problems with others
- Avoid taking alcohol and drugs
- Get enough rest
- Spread awareness among people to initiate early treatment

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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.

For further information please contact:
Sanjeev Khanna - 9871079105
Md Adib Ahmad – 9873716235
hsgima@gmail.com
IMA Public & Media Advocacy Cell