Loneliness a growing concern among elderly in India

- Every fifth senior citizen in the country requires psychological counselling
- Geriatric care should focus on handling the emotional needs of the elderly as well

New Delhi, 11 September 2017: As per a study, one in every two elderly individuals suffers from loneliness in India. Additionally, every fifth senior citizen in the country requires some kind of psychological counselling. The major reason cited for this loneliness is living alone. But, other factors too contribute to loneliness at this age, such as, less interaction with family members, poor health, and social isolation. As per the IMA, a persistent feeling of loneliness among the elderly doubles the risk of developing Alzheimer’s-like symptoms compared to those who felt connected to others.

Improved healthcare worldwide has increased the average lifespan of an individual and India is no exception to this. Increased longevity also means a rise in the percentage of elderly population. From being gainfully engaged, they are left with nothing to do in this critical phase of their life.

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, “A rapidly ageing population is a matter of concern due to two factors. One, there is a lack of the right attitude towards the elderly in India. Traditionally, children looked after their parents. However, with the advent of more and more nuclear families, children have little time or resources for their parents. There is the issue of migration from rural areas to urban areas to seek employment. Then some children emigrate abroad for higher education or jobs. Parents are left behind and often stay alone. Healthcare is expensive and many elderly people have no social security coverage such as pension and Mediclaim. All of these contribute to loneliness and alienation in the later stages of life.”

Companionship is one of the primary needs in old age. Geriatric care in India is yet to take off in a major way. The need of the hour is to go beyond just primary care and train caregivers in understanding and tending to the emotional and psychological needs of the elderly they work with.

Adding further, Dr Aggarwal, said, “‘Forget me Not’ is a campaign proposed by the IMA for the elderly population enabling them to lead a healthy and productive life with dignity. Doctors need to be trained to take care of the special needs of the older people. As doctors, we should not only provide them medical care, but also be a support to them.”
The elderly are a vulnerable group and need to be looked after. They can still contribute to the society. By neglecting them, we are losing out on their skills and years of experience. Efforts need to be made to improve quality of their lives and integrate them in the society. Health care for this population group, in particular, should be accessible and affordable; they need to be protected from ill-treatment and neglect. Those who wish to be productively engaged should be encouraged to do so.

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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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