Mental illnesses still not given due importance in India

Mental disorders such as schizophrenia need more awareness and acknowledgment in the country

New Delhi, 13 September 2017: According to a recent conducted countrywide survey, about 13.7% of India's general population suffers from a variety of mental illnesses. And, about 10.6% of them need immediate medical intervention. Although India was one of the first countries to put in place a national mental health programme, the progress on this front has been abysmal. Mental illness is still not accorded the importance it should be in our country, feel IMA officials.

One such mental disorder is Schizophrenia, which is a chronic and severe mental disorder affecting the way a person thinks, feels, and behaves. People with schizophrenia feel out of touch with reality. Though it is not as common as other mental disorders, the symptoms can be very disabling.

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, "Schizophrenia can occur between 16 and 30 years of age. In males, the symptoms can start to show at a relatively younger age than females. Many people are not aware that they have this disorder as it develops very slowly over a period of time. Such people tend to isolate themselves and become withdrawn. They get unusual thoughts and suspicions, and often have a family history of psychosis. In young people who develop schizophrenia, this stage of the disorder is called the ‘prodromal’ period. Hallucinations and delusions are also commonplace. Difficulty in diagnosis is compounded by the fact that many people do not believe they have it. Lack of awareness is a major issue.”

At times, those with schizophrenia may have additional illnesses such as substance abuse, posttraumatic stress disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and major depression. There is also research suggesting that this disorder may be due to faulty neuronal development in the brain of the fetus, which later emerges as a full-blown illness.

Adding further, Dr Aggarwal, said, “Treatment for schizophrenia patients is usually a combination of medication, psychological counseling, and self-help resources. With proper treatment, it is possible for most of the people to lead normal and productive lives. It can also help relieve many of the symptoms. However, it is imperative for those with the disorder to continue taking medication to prevent symptoms from coming back.”
Tips to help the affected cope with the disorder:

- Get them treatment and encourage them to continue the same.
- Remember that their beliefs or hallucinations seem very real to them.
- Tell them that you acknowledge that everyone has the right to see things their own way.
- Be respectful, supportive, and kind without tolerating dangerous or inappropriate behavior.
- Check to see if there are any support groups in your area.

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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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