

# A step towards the rehabilitation of the mentally ill



**Mental illness and the mentally ill by and large, are viewed with apathy and indifference by our society. The psychological disorders are not discussed openly in the society. Due to the taboo associated with these ailments, consulting a psychiatrist and taking medication take a backseat and the disease aggravates manifold. ‘Eklavya Foundation’ is taking active steps to counter precisely this stigma and apathy. Here is a brief report on this foundation that is celebrating its silver jubilee this year.**

The mentally ill and their caregivers have to face numerous challenges. Owing to the insensitivity, misconceptions,

inattention towards the disorder and lack of insight on the part of the society in general, the condition worsens enormously and assumes alarming proportions. This is conspicuous in the society around us and we have seen and experienced this time and again. However, this state of affairs has not been much investigated and no concrete steps have been taken to ameliorate the situation. “Battling the ailment and the symptoms arising out of it is comparatively easy but battling the callous and unsympathetic societal attitude is immensely difficult” is what the mentally ill and their caregivers seem to reiterate.

## **Social Intervention**

In case of serious physical disorders like cancer, diabetes etc. the patients receive support, informal guidance and sympathy from personal acquaintances in general and the near and dear in particular.

This support system motivates the patients and goes a long way in their recuperation. Of late, we have witnessed a sea change in the attitude of the society towards ailments like Aids and Leprosy, too. Information and support are easily available now, to the patients suffering from Aids and Leprosy. However, this is not the case with mental disorders which are still shrouded in mystery. There is complete disregard and utter neglect when it comes to psychological disorders. The situation cannot be managed by increasing the number of mental health professionals alone or by upgrading the effectiveness of the medication. The patients and their kin must receive help from the immediate environment. This can be achieved by training the laymen, patients and their care-givers. Moreover, patients should not sit idly by waiting for the society to

change. Rather, the patients and their family members should initiate change in themselves and contribute actively to the societal change. This is precisely the core of the philosophy that Eklavya Foundation propagates.

### **Community Sensitization**

World Health Organization is making great strides in this direction. It is necessary to establish such informal institutions and run them steadily, steadfastly and effectively in Maharashtra too. Taking cognizance of the fact, Eklavya Self Help Group and subsequently Eklavya Foundation were formed twenty-five years ago. In its nascent stage only a Self Help Group was formed. It was later that gradual attempts were made by Eklavya Foundation to sensitize community regarding psychological disorders, eradicate stigma associated with them etc. through various programmes organized in schools, colleges, senior citizen groups, women's clubs etc.

To date, the foundation has released various booklets, articles, bulletins regarding mental illness thereby voicing the experiences and the success stories of the patients suffering from mental disorders. In India, professional mental health services and non-government organizations related to mental health are easily available in Chennai and Bengaluru and therefore, these cities are often hailed as the 'Mental Health Capitals' of India. In the same vein, Eklavya Foundation is keen to provide basic information regarding psychological ailments, raise awareness about them, eradicate stigma, and weave a web of self help groups in Pune too. Eklavya Foundation thus aspires to make Pune the 'Mental Health Capital' of India by fulfilling its aforementioned objectives.

### **A Workshop for the Volunteers**

To mark the silver jubilee celebration of Eklavya Self Help Group, a workshop is organized

on 21 and 22 January 2023 in which renowned Psychiatrist from Miraj, Dr Arun Rukadikar will guide the volunteers. The volunteers from Ahmednagar, Goa and Mumbai apart from Pune will participate in the workshop. The foundation intends to organize many such workshops in foreseeable future at various places in order to train volunteers, to sensitize the community, eradicate stigma and form self help groups. The foundation has already started taking steps in this direction.

### **Anil Vartak, Ph.D**

(The author is the President of Eklavya Foundation for Mental Health, Pune.)  
avartak@yahoo.com  
+91 9503710859

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