

Indian Psychiatric Society Fights COVID-19

An official report

The COVID-19 pandemic has been an unprecedented worldwide crisis leading to a series of subsequent consequences for physical and mental well-being, economy, socio-political organization and infrastructure. It is well known that in addition to impacting physical health, prevailing situations and measures like social distancing and lockdown are expected to have an enormous impact on mental health also.

Indian Psychiatric Society (IPS) is playing a proactive role in the management of mental health issues of the Indian population through various activities. We are at the forefront of dealing with psychological impact on the populace, supporting our fellow members and liaising with the government, other professional medical organizations and NGOs for improving situations related to mental health in our country.

IPS has developed advisories for the Government of India, its fellow members and the general public regarding appropriate steps to be taken for mental health wellbeing during this pandemic. These were appropriately circulated and put on the official website of IPS for wider perusal. IPS is conducting nationwide online surveys for mental health impact of COVID-19 pandemic on health care professionals as well as on general public. Various branches and subcommittees of IPS are also holding several webinars and using different social media platforms for health care workers (HCWs), mental health professionals (MHPs) and general public enabling them to readjust to the new realities arising out of this worldwide crisis.

MHPs across the country have come together to provide free voluntary online, tele-psychiatry and video conferencing services for all in collaboration with NGOs. As of now, 656 mental health professionals have been offering their services for this activity.

The MHPs in different parts of the country have quickly reorganised their services. Outpatients and inpatient services are being provided following new norms of social distancing, respiratory hygiene, cough etiquettes etc. Deaddiction services have changed the dispensing patterns for opioid deaddiction services, IDUs and methadone maintenance clients. They are now being given a week's supply of Buprenorphine and methadone as take away

respectively. Many institutions are running mobile units for dispensing psychotropic medications and providing consultations.

IPS is playing an active role in the training of HCWs for working in the care of COVID-19 clients. Training on stress management, support and counselling is being provided to the HCWs in need during posting in COVID-19 wards as well as during their quarantine and isolation periods. MHPs are also taking an active part in the preparation of additional workforces during COVID-19 like training of National Cadet Corp volunteers, veterinary doctors, etc. IPS members are providing resources and consultation to print and electronic media for reliable mental health information in the context of situations like lockdown, domestic violence and substance use-related problems.

Government of India has issued a tele-medicine guideline as the patients are unable to visit hospitals and clinics. For improving its practical utility, an official request was made to Government of India by IPS to allow prescription of certain prohibited psychotropic medication like phenobarbitone, clobazam and clonazepam through tele-medicine to which government agreed. This is expected to help a wide variety patients.

IPS is hopeful, remains fully committed and stands with World Psychiatry Association in all its endeavours in this fight against COVID 19 pandemic.

Dr P K Dalal, President, Indian psychiatric Society

Dr TSS Rao, Hon Gen Secretary, Indian psychiatric Society

Dr Mrugesh Vaishnav, Imm Past President, Indian psychiatric Society

Dr MSVK Raju, World Psychiatry Association, A representative, Zone-16 & Past President, Indian psychiatric Society