Presidential Address at the 39th Annual Conference of the Indian Psychiatric Society (IPS)- Rajasthan Chapter 2024

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INTRODUCTION

Distinguished guests, esteemed colleagues, honored delegates and dear budding psychiatrists.

It is my privilege to stand before you today as President of the Indian Psychiatry Society, Rajasthan Chapter, as I pledge to tirelessly promote excellence in psychiatric care.

I wish to thank every one of you for your unconditional support and trust, and I will be committed to fostering innovation, inclusivity, and compassion in our pursuit of better mental health outcomes.

Presidents who preceded me cultivated this legacy of academic perfection and innovation, which left a profound mark on all of us. The train of thought for what tenure looks like begins with choosing a theme. Focusing on the *preventables* in mental health care it is my heartfelt desire to work on the WHO theme: *It is Time to Prioritize Mental Health in the Workplace*. Since it is far from being part of mainstream public health disclosure, breaking the silence around mental health in the workplace is not just a societal duty but a strategic imperative for encouraging a healthy and productive work environment.

Employed adults spend more time working than any other activity during their waking hours. In myriad ways and at its best, work that provides a livelihood can become a source of meaning, purpose, and joy, but the pursuit of professional success, the cut-throat nature of the professional world, and excessive self-imposed pressure to match societal expectations fuelled by social media comparisons have flared serious mental health issues at the workplace.

In a survey by McKinsey (2022) in 15 countries including 15000 employees, it was observed that about 60% of workers faced mental health issues at some point in their careers. It is a silent epidemic that worsened in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Workplace mental health is influenced by the complexity of social determinants such as work-life balance, job security, and social support. In a governmental setup, people face unique challenges that affect their mental health. These

include bureaucratic pressures, budget constraints, monotonous work, high-stress levels, and inflexible working hours. In the private and corporate sectors, performance stress is always high. It is known that an optimal level of stress results in optimal arousal and performance. Excessive arousal causes stronger stress reactions, which can hamper performance.

Individuals with severe mental health conditions are more likely to experience inequality at work and may be excluded from employment. Being out of work increases the severity of mental illness, such as unemployment, and job and financial insecurity, and recent job loss is a risk factor for suicide attempts.

As employees battle this pressure, the stigma attached to mental health issues prevents them from seeking help, either at work or outside. The data consistently demonstrated that prioritizing workplace mental health is beneficial for people, companies, and communities. Fostering mental health in the workplace presents a unique challenge for psychiatrists. By understanding these obstacles and developing innovative solutions, psychiatrists can create supportive work environments that promote employee well-being and productivity.

To prevent work-related mental health conditions, WHO recommends employers implement "organizational interventions" that directly target working conditions and environments in comparison to individual interventions. These include flexible working arrangements, worker involvement in decisions about their jobs, and workload modification.

Amid high levels of job stress and burnout across the global workforce, 13 countries around the world have introduced the "*Right to disconnect legislation.*" It was first introduced in France in 2017 as part of the country's labor reform. It refers to the right of employees to fully disconnect from work-related tasks and responsibilities outside of their regular working hours without fear of negative consequences or repercussions. This includes not checking work emails or messages, not taking work calls, and not being available for work-related requests.

Another unique move is "*Unhappy leave,*" as announced in China in March 2024, to describe a new type of leave policy adopted by some companies. It allows employees to take time off when they feel unhappy, stressed, or burned out. It reflects a shift towards prioritizing employee well-being and recognizing the importance of mental health in the workplace.

As we embark on our journey together, we will be challenged by the hurdles of limited resources, including time, finances, and manpower, especially understaffing at Medical Colleges, NMHP units, and District Hospitals. We will try to address these issues on priority; however, I request you to utilize the strengths, skills, and weaknesses of all members of your team to match them to the right task and utilize resources in the best way possible.

As Dr APJ Abdul Kalam said, "All birds find shelter during rain but an eagle avoids the rain by flying above the clouds." Be the eagle. Spread your wings and fly high; the sky is your canvas of endless possibility.

Individually, we are a drop; together, we are an ocean. Long Live Indian Psychiatry Society, Rajasthan Chapter!

Thank You!

Dr. Vinod Kumar Daria
September 14, 2024