



PROMOTION OF MENTAL HEALTH: BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

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WHO describes mental health as:

... a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community'.

Thus, psychiatrists who opt to shift to the practice of mental health have a far bigger responsibility in their professional life than the mere treatment of minor and major psychiatric morbidity. The Pakistan Psychiatric Society has shown its resolve to offer this fundamental shift to its members. The theme of the forthcoming National Conference of the Pakistan Psychiatric Society in November 2017 is Promotion of Mental Health: Building Partnerships. Given the spectre of mental health challenges, particularly in developing countries, and a tragic scarcity of human resource to deal with it, this indeed is an apt theme.

In an earlier editorial of JPPS, Psychiatry or Mental Health, Which Road to Take?², we had highlighted the significance of a shift from psychiatry to mental health³. Such a shift links mental health professionals to a world beyond diseases of the mind, and holds promise for a far greater impact of our profession on the society. A world where mental health professionals not only deal with those who are challenged with mental illness but rather offer guidance and support to the 'well' or the 'not diseased'. Psychiatrists can, therefore, opt to contribute towards global mental and spiritual health, resilience and wellness.

Promotion of mental health aims to help individuals and the community to attain a state of positivity. It proposes strategies to rid oneself from the stigma of mental illness, irrationality, and ills of bigotry, paranoia, intolerance, lust, greed, and jealousy. It offers plans of action to develop resilience, competence, and a feeling of psychological well being while simultaneously providing opportunities to self actualise.

Promotion of positive mental health includes living a fulfilling life governed by respect and care for oneself. It offers healthy provisions for mind and soul, concern for inner peace, social harmony, as well as, for bodily health; all of it to attain positive mental health. It assists people to stay realistic about their capacity, prowess, and not compare or unrealistically compete with others. Positive mental health is to grant oneself opportunities to clarify misconceptions, update one's outdated concepts to rid the mind of errors of thinking or cognitive distortions, not let emotions rule over intellect, preserve insight, foresight, and vision, live a life supported by values, and to act logically and responsibly at all times.

Mental health is also about healthy life styles, responsible child rearing, appropriate and productive schooling, trustworthy marital and family bonds in one's personal life; as well as skilled and productive work place performance, showing commitment towards environment, human and animal rights, and care of the disadvantaged in professional and social domains.

The promotion of mental health, albeit idealistic, is an all encompassing and noble pursuit. Yet, it is only through this state of positive mental health in individuals and communities that Pakistan can become a 'healthy' and truly formidable force in the modern world. The ideals envisaged by the philosophy of promotion of mental health are a colossal undertaking for psychiatrists of Pakistan. The famously quoted lines 'war is too important to be left to soldiers alone' aptly describes the limitations of psychiatrists if they take it upon themselves to promote mental health. The task is too important to be left solely to psychiatrists. They must therefore "build partnerships" as stated by the theme of the National Conference of PPS 2017.

With this display of commitment by PPS towards promotion of mental health, the members of the society must understand the enormity of the task and what it entails. Substantial changes in policy, legislation, resource allocation, regulatory reforms, and prioritizing of mental health at all tiers of government, and society are needed. Such an undertaking by PPS would require leadership, advocacy, strategic project development and action plans, communications, and research. None of which can be achieved without forming partnerships with policy makers, legislators, opinion-makers, media, and societal institutions.

To form such partnerships, the PPS must look inwards. The members would have to unite in their own ranks, overcome egocentricity, bridge the gap between academic psychiatrists and those engaged in provision of psychiatric services primarily, and resolve conflicts. They must then take initiative and reach out to their psychologist colleagues bringing them into the fold of mental health. This partnership can best be started and nurtured by opening teaching units of psychiatry to undergraduate and postgraduate trainees in clinical psychology. Once the trainees and trainers of psychiatry and psychology start to work hand in hand in the care of the mentally ill,



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the existing paranoia and alienation will give way to mutual bonding and trust between psychologists and psychiatrists. This partnership will go a long way in helping both parties play their rightful and coordinated roles in patient care as well as in promotion of mental health.

United, the psychiatrists and psychologists can go on to form links with fellow mental health professionals and their respective organisations operating abroad. At present this type of liaison is limited to invitations to attend congresses and conferences of societies of psychiatrists and psychologists alone. They can serve as a huge resource in our efforts to promote mental health in Pakistan not only by pooling ideas but also in advocacy, research, and communication. A recent practical example of such a partnership and collaboration is the start of second Fellowship in child and adolescent psychiatry by College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan, and a Masters programme in forensic psychiatry at University of Health Sciences, Lahore.

After having formed partnerships within the mental health community, we can pursue the crucial task of reaching out to corridors of power. The politicians, bureaucrats and technocrats concerned with policy and legislation are always forthcoming. They only need to be convinced about the significance and urgency of the task. In our own myopic ways, we have used our clout with politicians and policy makers for our own gains rather than converting them to the cause of mental health. The best tool to produce substantial shifts in the domains of policy, and allocation of resources, is home grown data and evidence. We have virtually nothing to show and therefore our thrust is often personal charisma, and oration. The hard evidence that comes from thorough and quality research and evaluation is nowhere in offering. However, all is not lost. Mental health is included by the Planning Commission of Pakistan as a priority in the five year and ten year National Plans. We have a robust document on policy, strategy and action plan in form of the National Programme of Mental Health emulated by several countries in the EMRO region of WHO.

We must then go on to form partnerships with those operating in private health and non- health sectors, Non-Governmental

Organisations, and businesses alike. Chanting the all successful mantra of the World Health Organisation 'Mental Health for All - All for Mental Health', we need to leave the comforts of our offices, wards and hospitals to reach out to the community at large. Rather than going in concentric circles, we can instead cut across various tiers, ranks, and professions in our bid to demystify and destigmatise psychiatry. This will help the society to benefit fully from the promise that the mental health profession holds for it.

Once psychiatry starts to evolve and embrace its sister specialties, a whole world of opportunities for collaborative research, and service delivery in health care will open for them. Through the collaboration with neurologists, cardiologists, diabeticians, psychiatry can play its role in introducing healthy life styles, behavioural shifts in diets, smoking, drug abuse and misuse, safe sex, safe driving, and safe environments. The introduction of mental health may also alleviate the burden of disease, helping Pakistan take its first steps towards its contribution to global well-being.

The Journal of Pakistan Psychiatric Society provides a "bridge" to psychologists, physicians, neurologists, behavioural and social scientists, as much as psychiatrists to reach out to each other. This editorial is an attempt to strengthen that bridge. It is to also set an agenda for change if we want to build these bridges. We have also listed the specific steps needed if we set out to realise the fundamental dream of promotion of mental health in Pakistan. We hope that the organisers of the forthcoming National Conference of PPS, 2017 find the content of this editorial useful.

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