**International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking**

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“*It is impossible to understand addiction without asking what relief the addict finds, or hopes to find, in the drug or the addictive behaviour*”—Gabor Maté, In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction

The International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking is observed on June 26 and this year’s theme is ‘Share Facts on Drugs, Save Lives’. The ideas is for nations to reach share experiences in a bid to collectively tackle the serious issue of drug abuse that is responsible for distortions in human behaviour, damaging the health of people, leading to untimely deaths, mental and physical diseases. Besides, addiction has torn apart many families, destroyed established careers and prevented able students from pursuing their academics. These are by no means minor problems and cannot be ignored by anyone as they impact the lives of not only the addicts themselves but also the people around them. In Pakistan alone, drug addict population has increased from one million in 1979 to around 7.3 million in 2020 which is an alarming increase of over one million per decade.

Reasons for persons falling into addiction, hardly matters. From innocent experimentation to finding respite in escapism, there can be multitude explanations for why human beings resort to abuse of drugs. of“Countering prevailing notions of addiction as either a genetic disease or an individual moral failure, Dr. Gabor Mate presents an eloquent case that addiction—all addiction—is in fact a case of human development gone askew.” However, what is more important is how to rescue addicts from this disastrous ailment. One must understand that although in most of the cases addiction is self-inflicted but rehabilitation requires human support. There are very few addicts with exceptional willpower who consciously rid themselves of addiction. Majority comprise those people who are helpless and unable to fight with their abusive dependence on any kind of psychoactive substance.

The usual strategy for treatment is the rehabilitation programme conducted by psychiatrists and psychologists, the former depending more on medicines while the latter preferring psycho-therapeutic sessions with both, recommending a compassionate approach towards addicts. Group therapies are held for instilling collective cognisance regarding personal efforts in controlling and curing this malaise. These also help to create awareness of each other’s afflictions, understand the reasons for adopting such habits and together fight back to overcome them.

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One of the psychologists, passionately involved in treating addicts, once claimed that he had personally tried a few substances to understand their true nature and their effects on the human body. This has greatly helped him in discerning his patients’ feelings giving him the necessary insight into problems being faced by them. One must understand that giving up addiction in one day is nearly impossible as withdrawal symptoms in some cases of drug abuse are extremely painful. Rehabilitation is sometimes a long drawn process that requires tremendous control, monitoring and patience as there are marked tendencies of relapse wherein patients fall back to addiction. Therefore, not only do the therapists need to perform their duty, even the patients’ families and friends have to play a pivotal role during the entire period.

Dr Mate has provided a number of scientific evidences one of which is that addictive tendencies arise in those parts of the brain that control some of the human beings’ most basic life-sustaining needs and functions. These include incentives and motivation, physical and emotional pain relief, regulation of stress and the capacity to feel and receive love. If these areas remain undeveloped for whatever reason, the inclination to finding refuge in addiction is much stronger.

In a recent article of June 18, 2021 published in the Washington Post, another break-through has been achieved in curing addiction. “Buckhalter, 35, is a walking, talking laboratory for the outer edge of drug addiction therapy, a living experiment in what may be possible someday”. He has become the only person in the United States, whose substance abuse disorder was relieved by deep brain stimulation, a treatment used to reverse Parkinson’s disease, epilepsy etc. but never attempted for drug addiction. The procedure involves the implantation of metal-tipped electrodes in the brain by drilling a couple of small holes in the skull. This device also records the brain’s electrical activity. Although Buckhalter has to take anti-drug medication and undergo counselling, he has managed to stay away from drugs for 600 days since the implant although he still occasionally experiences anxiety, depression and craving that initially led him to addiction at a very young age.

“This is not a magical cure,” said Ali Rezai, director of the Rockefeller Neuroscience Institute at West Virginia University, who performed Buckhalter’s surgery. “This is a treatment that allows you to dial down the anxiety, improve the mood, make people more in charge of their bodies, make them less fragile and susceptible.”

Of course, research is still in progress but this innovation has great hope for those chronic patients who, despite their desire find it difficult to let go of addiction. Besides, the experiment refutes the idea that there cannot be a surgical cure for addiction.

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