

The reproductive healthcare services in the country have largely remained a neglected area of late. Due to this, the area to provide guidance and treatment of such problems has become hotchpotch because of all sort of information and solution pouring in from every Tom, Dick and Harry, who happen to dominate the field instead of the qualified ones. This has led to suspicions and wrong interpretation of diseases in the minds of the potential patients.

A survey by conducted in this revealed that the facilities for reproductive healthcare services are almost non-existent in the country. The body mechanism of humans is quite a complex one and harmonic dysfunction can take place due to a host of reasons. Sexual or erectile dysfunction is also linked with these hormonal problems. The sexual function of body organs is also dependent on age. The human body sees a physiological decline with age. This is a process that takes place with individuals of all races and in all the countries. Because of this, it has other dimensions attached to it as well, which are not usually taken into account by the practitioners. The ever-increasing anxiety, tension, stress pollution, unhealthy dietary habits and life style are adding to the sex problems.

The gravity of the problem is that allopathic medicine has so far failed to provide a solution to these diseases. Atherosclerosis and degenerative lax of nervous system affect sexual ability and need excessive work up and proper management by the experts. The head of venereology department of the Mayo Hospital, Dr. Atif Hameed Khan claimed it to be the only department of its kind anywhere in the province. He, however, regretted that no lecture on the specific topic of sex any medical college or elsewhere although it was high time to educate students. "Dermatologists, venereologists or urologists treat patients, but this remains restricted to the use of male hormone with some multi-vitamins and anti-anxiety drugs," he said while adding that nothing more than this can be offered to the

A neglected area

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AWAIS SALEEM deliberates upon myths and realities attached to reproductive healthcare and says that the need of the hour is that quacks' assembling, and their outlets and advertisements should be banned

miserable youth having organic disease like atherosclerosis. Patients thronging these places in search of cure also seem to have little faith in the abilities of qualified physicians. Instead, they prefer to turn towards the quacks, Hakeems and Unani medicine providing recluse for the miserable souls with their age-old prescription like neurotonics and vasodilators.

Most of these quacks and street vendors, who are monopolising scene, are working without rational and providing medication, which adversely affects existing disease instead of curing them. These healers are often alleged of minting money, harassing the poor and providing false hopes for recovery to their patients. In most of the cases, these quacks do not differ between a normal and a sick person. When Hakeem Ataullah Jagranvi was asked about it, he said that the quacks earn bad name for the qualified and reputed practitioners. According to him, 30 to 50 patients came to his clinic every month with sex related diseases and most of them were cured with herbal medicines having no side effects.

When the availability of sex medicines on different city outlets was checked, it was revealed that the price varies between Rs 3 to Rs 275 and even some of the banned registered drugs were openly on sale. A leading chemist when inquired about this, wishing anonymity replied that all sex medicines were sold as herbal medicines to avoid check from regulatory authorities. The sale of

these medicines boosts up because of advertisements, hear-say and the purchasers mostly remain illiterate or semi-literate class while most of them happen to be over 40 years of age, he said while adding that some of the senior doctors were even prescribing *mujra* (name of a medicine) to the patients although it had been banned by the government.

More than 7000 patients visited the venereology department of Mayo Hospital in 2001. Majority of them complained of infertility while sexual weakness remained the second highest and most of the unmarried patients were diagnosed as having "sexual psychosis." A survey of the urology departments of different city hospitals revealed that most kidney patients were victims of quacks, who give the so-called *kushtas* having steroids to their patients causing stoppage of bone-marrow formation, cancer and painful deaths.

Psychologists believe that there is no proper panacea for these people to go and no proper medication because of social norms and taboos. They go to people known through personal contacts, newspapers, advertisements, wall-chalking and human traffic found is abundance. The youths get information from printed list and friends. "A layman does not know physiology leading to frustration and variety of malpractice," emphasised one of the psychologists consulted while adding that various aspects of reproductive medicine, like venereal diseases etc., were unknown in most of the cases and

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vigilant as they ought to be, and only raids if any complaint is received about the adulteration of herbal medicine with steroids. However, the instances of such concrete actions remain few and far between. The Drug Act of 1976 recog-

nises only allopathic medicine and none of the other medical practitioners. Hence, state functionaries at the helm of affairs are little bothered about the presence of such service delivery outlets, their advantages and disadvantages. The PMA general secretary, Dr

Ashraf Nizami dismissed the existing the needful. He claimed that health department has no control over homeopathic, Unani medicines or food supplements being sold, leading to open sale of *Kushtas*, which are causing liver and kidney failures among the users. The health ministry's federal licensing board and product registration board had so far registered about 27,000 allopathic medicines, as compared to India and Bangladesh, where registered medicines are only 500, he said. He added that there was restrictive sex education in eastern society although it was an important mechanism of the body and medical graduates were academically trained to investigate, diagnose and give preliminary treatment. However, no further specialised and focused training was imparted to them to deal with a number of clinical and surgical complications, he said while referring to the dearth of qualified sexologists in the country.

These social norms and taboos are perhaps the main reasons that no survey had been carried out and no input has been made towards the formulation of a policy to cater to the needs of reproductive healthcare services. As a result, this important component of body mechanism has become a laughing stock amongst the illiterate healers and the clueless masses. The awareness about sexual problems, even aids, is drastically lacking. Erectile dysfunction is not often discussed as a problem and lack of sharing makes the case worse for an individual.

The need of the hour is that quacks assembling and the service delivering outlets, along with their advertisements, should be banned. The confidence of the patients needs to be developed for the qualified medical practitioners instead of quacks. The regulatory authorities need to be more efficient and vigilant in the performance of their duties. But before everything, this matter needs to be accepted and realised as a problem by eliminating all social and cultural barriers before it is too late. Otherwise, this sensitive issue will remain hostage in the hands of the quacks, as has been the case so far. ■