

# I think with thy heart

Only media can properly educate masses and change general outlook towards mental sickness. It can inculcate positive attitude in families of such patients, woe them to take their ill dears to psychiatrists and guide them to keep a constant liaison with the professionals. In absence of these things, chances of relapse in mental patients are enormous, suggests Ayesha Bhatti

**A**bnormal or mentally retarded people are found almost everywhere around the world — in every village, town, city and country. These people suffer from mental ailment by birth or develop some disorder later in life. Our society, by and large, turns no attention towards treatment and rehabilitation of such people and ultimately they become what we generally call Pagals.

The News conducted a survey to know whether professionals engaged in treatment and rehabilitation of mentally ill people are satisfied with the facilities available to such patients in government or NGO-run hospitals or clinics and what they expect from and suggest to government, philanthropists and families of patients and general masses.

All of the randomly selected psychologists and psychiatrists in Lahore expressed their dissatisfaction to the facilities available for the treatment of mental patients. Dr Mohsina Najeel, Principal Clinical Psychologist at Department of Child and Family Psychiatry, Mayo Hospital Lahore, said, "In a country like ours when the whole national is dissatisfied with the healthcare provided to sane or capable population, how can a poor government and NGOs can spare their energies to provide and promote the needed facilities to the outcast of mentally-ill people."

Ideally speaking every mentally ill person who completes hospitalisation needs to join rehabilitation centres, instead of directly facing community stresses. However, in view of a large number of such patients the number of rehabilitation is scanty and society's attitude towards mental

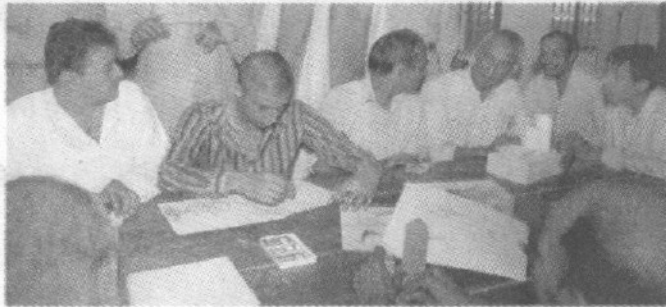
patients even after their procurement of health remains inconsiderate. The lowest sector considers mental illness either manifestation of Jin Bhoot or some sacred soul and the upper sector tends to seek medical or psychological basis of it. Nevertheless, for middle class it is still no less than a stigma. There is a dire need to educate people about mental illness and its associated myths.

Betterment of prevalent situation call for handsome amount of funding. As a poor government cannot fulfill this need, the philanthropists should come forward and join hands in building new hospitals, rehabilitation centres and sponsor research projects. Our mass media, particularly TV and radio, should utilise its magical strength to educate the society for the betterment of mentally ill.

Tanveer Nasr, Principal Clinical Psychologist at Department of Adult Psychiatry, Mayo Hospital, Lahore, said, "Facilities provided by government to mental patients are limited only to big cities and concentrated in teaching hospitals. No such services are available at DHQ hospitals with a few exceptions. The rehabilitation centres are very few. For instance there are only two or three rehabilitation centres in Lahore. Government except at Govt Psychiatric Hospital, Lahore, provides no rehabilitation facilities."

About facilities available to the mental patients in government or NGO-run

hospitals, clinics, Iram Bokhari, Senior Clinical Psychologist at Department of Psychiatry, Ganga Ram Hospital, Lahore said, "Psychiatric services are confined to urban areas and only 20 to 30 per cent patients manage to benefit from these services. These institutions do not cover a major chunk of psychiatric population and rehabilitation services are negligible. Though society's general outlook towards mental illness has improved in the past decade, there is a long way to go. People should not stigmatize the patients and possess an accepting attitude towards mentally ill. Philanthropists should finance for the establishment of optimum



mental health facilities. There should be a quota in at least some jobs for rehabilitated persons so that they do not find themselves patients anymore and assimilate easily in the mainstream.

Dr M Saleem Akhtar, Medical Officer at Psychiatry Department, Services Hospital, Lahore, said, "The number of psychiatric units in hospitals, psychiatrists and other professionals is very low and there are hardly any psychiatric services available in the rural areas. Mental illness is regarded as possession of Jin, punishment of some sin, a contagious, communicable disease and treated by torture and other primitive methods. The society should be motivated to help such patients at every step and drop indifferent attitude."

He called on government to set up a network of psychiatric services starting from major cities to far-off areas and ban psychiatric quackery. Social workers should work for creating

employment opportunities for rehabilitated persons, he said and added that the families of patients should recognise psychiatric treatment, follow-up and morally assist their mentally ill kins at every stage of treatment and thereafter.

Sajjad Ahmed, Clinical Psychologist working with an NGO and rendering voluntary services at Government Psychiatric Hospital, Lahore said the facilities available to mentally ill persons in any institution are not upto the required level. He said still there is a need for providing sufficient medicines, food and other rehabilitation facilities to such people. He further said that most of the psychiatric population remains untreated just because of economic compulsions.

"The rehabilitation, especially vocational rehabilitation services are quite insufficient," he said.

We have problem in accepting fact that people can

become mentally ill as anyone may suffer from any other disease like ulcer, fever etc. Our general view towards such people needs a n improvement especially in

attitude of labelling them as Pagals, which is very distressing for patients and prevents them from coming out of their fantasy life where they feel safe.

The society should accept such persons' problems. We should give them respect and should not call them names. A positive, loving and respectful attitude helps them come out of fantasy life and establish contact with reality and also in viewing the things much more clearly.

The government should admit that such patients are largely, if not solely, its liability. It should forthwith overcome the dearth of psychiatric instructions by calling in NGOs and social welfare organisations. It should give more attention to vocational rehabilitation because majority of mental patients come from downtrodden segments of our society and they find it impossible to get jobs and earn their livelihood in absence of skills after procuring health. This will help them start their independent small businesses.



view to uplifting condition of mentally ill people with emphasis on rural areas where there are no or very limited psychiatric services.

About the motive behind MIND, he said he being a psychiatrist felt the need to change general attitude towards mental illness. He said he set up MIND feeling pity of the condition of mental patients in Pakistan, who are usually neglected and man-handled at the hands of their uneducated families and faith-healers in absence of sufficient state-patronised mental health care. "If the affluent with a mentally ill member in family takes up the gauntlet and set up MIND-like institutions instead of looking towards government for changing the milieu prevalent in the domain of mental health, it would be beneficial not only for their own ill kin but many other poor patients whose families are sometimes forced by financial constraints to catch at primitive methodologies for treatment," Saad added.

MIND started its maiden project in 1992 at the Shrine of Haji Sher, Burewala where people chain their mentally ill kins with trees in the compound of shrine as

a belief that the chains would break some day with the end of their ailment. Saad said MIND stepped in, established a psychiatric clinic near the shrine and started providing free services — evaluation and medicines — to the chained patients without challenging the belief of people.

MIND teams comprising psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers visit the shrine regularly for providing free medical prescription and medicines to the chained patients, Saad said, adding, "MIND's teams have so far provided free treatment to over 28,000 patients in Burewala alone."

The organisation started its second project in Hafizabad when came to know that psychiatric patients are treated there through blood-letting. A free psychiatric clinic was set up at the District

# *Mental illness and the myths*

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Headquarters Hospital, Hafizabad where so far 13,000 patients have been treated. Saad's charity body — MIND started assisting government in providing the psychiatric services to the residents (chronic psychiatric patients) in the Halfway House (a mid way between house and hospital) at Lahore in 1996. The patients are provided residence and attendants to look after them so that the patients find they are living in their houses. The psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers also pay visits to Halfway House twice a week. The organisation is also

involved in providing transport food and diagnostic charges of poor patients in different hospitals. It also pays for expensive tests such as MRI, CT Scan for psychiatric patients who cannot afford such tests. It arranges domiciliary visits by sending a team of doctors to visit psychiatrically ill patients at their homes and has now started its postal help services for the patients who are in the far-flung areas and have no access to the psychiatric services. These letters are replied and patients are provided economic help where needed.