



# Mind matters

World Mental Health Day observed on October 10 brings the spotlight back on mental wellbeing—a topic that is still a taboo in the country

BY BINDU GOPAL RAO

**A**run, 34, manager in a multinational company, visited the hospital with complaints of palpitations, nervousness, dryness of mouth, breathing difficulty, extreme fear of death, lack of concentration and significant sleep disturbance. He underwent a detailed investigation along with psychological evaluation and started on medications; he observed that the anxiety symptoms subsided gradually. Over the next few weeks, he was engaged in a series of psychotherapy sessions focusing on assertive skills, coping patterns and problem-solving strategies thus working on preventing future panic attacks. Srikar, 24, team manager at an IT company, had a serious problem controlling his anger. During his first year of college, he had hit a senior who ragged him and that sowed the seeds of aggression. Subsequently, being in and out of relationships, brought in a lot of negative energy. He was put on a lifestyle management programme. He was given a schedule for psychological treatment which in his case was Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Relaxation Therapy.

Post treatment, he felt very light, stress-free, relaxed, calm and positive. These instances are just a couple of cases that highlight the magnitude of mental issues and the complexities they involve.

### **Mind connect**

With celebrities opening up on their battle with depression, mental health is coming to the forefront. While physical health issues are always addressed, mental health is often swept under the carpet. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not just the absence of disease or infirmity. Mental health is the overall wellness of how you think, feel and behave. A person is diagnosed with a mental disorder if he or she presents with pattern or changes in thinking, feeling and behavior. This amounts to distress or disruption in socio-occupational functioning, maintaining relationships, role functioning and performance at work or school. Unlike other medical illnesses, mental disorders are understood by bio-psycho-social model. The mental disturbance

could be biological (hypothyroidism, head injury), psychological (personality factors) or social (loss of job, migration, bereavement). The first step is to overcome the fear associated with the term mental health. “If you have a headache, you visit a doctor and take the prescribed drug. Similarly, mental health is to look at how a person’s brain sometimes can be unwell. There are other bodily functions and stressors in the environment that affect our mental health and wellbeing. In all, mental health and wellbeing is to learn how to overcome one’s distress which every individual processes differently,” says Sanjoni Sethi, psychologist.

### **Cause and effect**

Poor diet and irregular sleep patterns, excessive amounts of carbohydrates and sugar intake are some of the leading causes of mental illness or disharmonies. This affects the overall hormonal balance of your body resulting in changes in moods, emotions and ultimately behavior. “Alcohol and drugs have been known to cause damage in the brain and other organs that tend to lead to severe, long-lasting and

life-threatening problems. Individuals tend to be more impulsive which may result in poor decision-making skills leading to actions that can cause serious damage to oneself and others,” says, Dr Prakriti Poddar, an expert in mental health, director, Poddar Wellness Ltd and managing trustee of Poddar Foundation. Extremely demanding workplace or workload stress, lack of physical exercise and social isolation are some other causes for mental imbalance.

### Stay well

Positive mental health allows people to recognise their full potential, manage with the stresses of life, work productively and live diligently. Dr Johnsey Thomas, consultant psychologist, Aster Prime Hospital says, “The balance of how we think, feel, act, handle pressure, relate to others and make choices reflects the state of mental health; imbalance in the same can lead to mental illness.” Pravesh Gaur, director, Srauta Wellness says, “Many conditions that affect the brain may not be mental ailments but it does change the way our brain functions. It may cause behavioural changes or have an impact on our ability to think or perceive our surroundings. Mental well-being allows every one of us to understand what we are capable of doing and enables us to cope with stress efficiently.” People grade their wellbeing in various parameters. However, there are certain signs we all can watch out for, so that our near and dear ones are protected from any mental health hazards. “Various signs that can be used to identify distress could include recent changes in activity level, alteration or deterioration in performance of activities, sleep disturbances and changes in food habits (appetite) are often reported,” says Dr Bindoo Jadhav, HOD, department of psychiatry, K. J. Somaiya Hospital.

### Watch Out

### Tips

- › Get adequate sleep
- › Eat nutritious meals
- › Exercise regularly
- › Invest and spend quality time with family
- › ‘Engage in activities of one’s interest and avoid self-criticism
- › Avoid cigarettes and alcohol consumption
- › Inculcate stress management strategies like deep breathing, regular nature walks and playing with your pets
- › Meditate and do yoga
- › Engage in digital detox—limit the usage of mobile phones and other technology
- › Demarcate professional and personal lives and maintain boundaries

Mental illness refers to a number of mental ailments including anxiety, depression and addictions that may impact your mood, behaviour or thinking. It also includes serious conditions such as schizophrenia, psychosis, bipolar disorder and eating disorders like bulimia and anorexia. “Every illness has its own list of symptoms and signs but the common signs to identify in adolescents and adults are changes in biological functions like lack of sleep, appetite and sex drive, excessive worry, mood fluctuations, constant feeling of low, losing temper, concentration issues, avoiding friends and relatives, self-harm thoughts, anxiety attacks and the like,” says Dr Venkatesh Babu G.M., consultant psychiatrist, Fortis hospital, Bengaluru. Dr Naazneen Ladak, psychiatrist, Axis hospital, Mumbai, says, “Some feel restless and anxious, some may feel extreme happiness or extreme sadness, getting negative thoughts, feeling of dejection, rejection or hopelessness these are some basic signs, people can also face other signs like, lack of interest in



activities which they were previously interested in, constant low energy and also face difficulty in maintaining relationships.” Dr Sagar Lavania, consultant and head of department, psychiatry and mental health, Nayati Medicity, Mathura says, “It is not easy to tell if someone is going through mental illness. The actions and thoughts might be the typical behaviour of a person or the result of some kind of physical illness but one should watch out if some-

one feels sad or dejected, is unable to concentrate, worries too much or is gripped with fear or anxiety. Some of the signs that might indicate mental disorder include extreme emotions of guilt, sudden mood change, fatigue and sleeping issues.”

### Helping hands

One of the best ways to deal with mental issues is communication. Talk to your family and support system,

and seek professional help from qualified mental health practitioners. Niraj Dosi, co-founder, Save A Life foundation, says, “The first step in treating mental ailment is the realisation that you need help. Even if you feel helpless and drained, you need to accept the fact that your condition needs help. If you are showing any of the above symptoms and feel they are beyond your control then you should get professional help. Reach out to a

trusted relative or friend who you feel comfortable confiding in and go for medical support. Get hold of yourself and enrich your social interactions to keep your mind occupied. Join self-help support groups which have individuals sharing similar personal experiences. You may find something that can help you.” You can help yourself by first understanding that mental fitness is important for overall health and wellbeing. “Just like physi-



cal health requires a regular physical health regime which includes daily exercise to function optimally and maintain vigour and health, mental health needs some regular practices. Usually, anything which stimulates introspection is beneficial,” says Pragati Sureka, psychologist and mental health expert. Though most of us do not actually understand the actual problem, assuming it to be a situation that will pass away, but they do not understand that leaving it as it is will only lead to further degradation of the condition. “Understanding the symptoms of the mental wellness is the key to solution. While treatments like psychotherapy, counseling and medications can create wonders, then regular exercises, yoga and meditation help in maintaining the mental wellbeing. Choosing and finding the right mechanism takes time and patience, but it is important how much impact it creates on your thoughts and behavior,” says Dr Sandeep Govil, psychiatrist, Saroj

Super Speciality hospital, New Delhi. One of the first steps that anybody has to take before seeking help is to reach a state of acceptance about a psychological or behavioural challenge they are facing and then decide the path to recovery. “Self-help advice that is abundantly available may help resolve minor inner conflicts – sometimes just opening up to a loved one has great benefits to resolving mental conflicts. In more complex cases, it becomes important to seek help from a professional who will know how to navigate through the conflict. There are also many forums and help-lines available today to discuss one’s concerns under anonymity, which could be helpful to bring clarity on further steps to taken,” says Dr Divya Shree K. R., consultant psychiatrist, Aster CMI Hospital.

### ***Making the difference***

Sana Rubiyana, counselling psychologist, Fortis La Femme hospital, Richmond Road, Bengaluru says,

“There are a lot of stigma surrounding mental illness leading to shaming and lack of acceptance of those who suffer from mental illness. Raising awareness not only eliminates the stigma but also motivates people to seek help from mental health experts, while also increasing research in the field.” It is important to understand that it all starts in the mind and ends in the physical body. Meaning what we may be thinking or stressing over, also manifests in our physical body. Our mind and body are connected always. Luke Coutinho, Holistic Lifestyle Coach—Integrative Medicine says, “Most of our pain is caused because of our mindsets and belief systems. We are so attached to our own mindset and belief system of what and how love, death, loss, success should be, that anything even slightly different from our mindset affects us and we feel negative because things are not in line and accordance to what we believe and think.” □