Time to focus more on promoting mental health than treating mental illness

Mental health problems are a major contributor to overall burden of disease worldwide. In UK, it represents up to 23% of the total burden of disease - the largest single cause of disability.[1] It is estimated that mental health problems affect one in four of us at some time in our life. At any one time, one out of six living adults will be a sufferer.[2] Unfortunately, about one in 100 people has severe mental health problem. Mental health illnesses are not only a major cause of distress to individuals, their families and friends but also adversely affect the economy of nations. It is reported that about 11% of England's annual secondary care health budget is spent on mental health which accounts nearly 105 billion pound sterling every year.[3] It is important to note that changing societal structure, globalization, aging population, demanding and competitive nature of work and financial pressures are adversely affecting the mental health of people. People with mental health problems often are less qualified,[4] find it harder to both obtain and stay in work[5] and have lower incomes. Due to high health risk behaviours, such as smoking, alcohol and substance misuse, they are more likely to have poor physical health.[5] Some of them may indulge into criminal activities. Considering the cost of taking care of all above, it is estimated that cost of treating mental health problems could double over next 20 years.[6]

Many mental health problems start early in life.[7,8,9] People with severe mental illnesses die on average 20 years earlier than the general population.[8] Therefore, early interventions, particularly with vulnerable children and young people, can improve lifetime health and wellbeing, prevent mental illness and reduce costs incurred by ill health, unemployment and crime. Such interventions not only benefit the individual during their life, but also help them to become good parents, so their children in turn have a reduced risk of mental health problems and their consequences. However, people from all age groups should be benefited from appropriate steps to promote mental health and wellbeing and prevents mental illness.

A lot of efforts have been made in the past to improve the physical health of individuals by promoting healthy life style like regular exercises and healthy eating, however, little has been done with regard to promotion of positive mental health rather attention remained focused on treatment of mental health illnesses. Realizing the fact that poor mental health is closely connected with other problems, including poor physical health and problems in other areas like relationships, education and work prospects, UK government raised the slogan "No Health without Mental health"[9] and started formulated the strategy to promote positive mental health for people of all age groups.

The Foresight Programme initiated by the UK Government Office for Science, in its report, "Mental Capital and Wellbeing: Making the most of ourselves in the 21st century"[10] identified 'Five ways to wellbeing' as the wellbeing equivalent of "five fruit and vegetables a day". This model 'Five ways to wellbeing' suggests that people:

1. Connect… With the people around you. With family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. At home, work, school or in your local community. Think of these as the cornerstones of your life and invest time in developing them. Building these connections will support and enrich you every day.
2. Be active… Go for a walk or run. Step outside. Cycle. Play a game. Garden. Dance. Exercising makes you feel good. Most importantly, discover a physical activity you enjoy and that suits your level of mobility and fitness.
3. Take notice… Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the unusual. Notice the changing seasons. Savour the moment, whether you are walking to work, eating lunch or talking to friends. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.
4. Keep learning… Try something new. Rediscover an old interest. Sign up for that course. Take on a different responsibility at work. Fix a bike. Learn to play an instrument or how to cook your favourite food. Set a challenge you enjoy achieving. Learning new things will make you more confident as well as being fun.
5. Give… Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer your time. Join a community group. Look out, as well as in. Seeing yourself, and your happiness, as linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and creates connections with the people around you.

It is proposed that achieving a small change in the average level of wellbeing across the population would produce a large decrease in the percentage with mental disorder, and also in the percentage who have sub-clinical disorder. This model 'Five ways to wellbeing' has already been in practice by some local health trusts and public health bodies of UK and evidence of its effectiveness is emerging.[11] In Pakistan, an NGO, Mind Health Movement (MHM) Pakistan, has adopted this model and actively disseminating these key messages to public.

To build a healthier, more productive society we need better mental health & well-being and to prevent mental health problem. Mental health is everyone's business – individuals, families, employers, educators, communities and governments, all need to play their part. An organized effort is essential, starting from the earliest years in life, to improve the mental health and wellbeing of the population year on year. More efforts are required to change the focus from treating mental illness to promote mental health. Good mental health is fundamental to our physical health, our relationships, our education, our training, and our work as well as to achieving our potential. Let's join hands to make it possible.

DR KHADIJA MASOOD
President Mind Health Movement Pakistan
Consultant General Adult Psychiatry
Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust
United Kingdom (UK)

REFERENCES

1. WHO (2008). The Global Burden of Disease:2004 update, available at: www.who.int/healthinfo/global_burden_disease
2. McManus s, Meltzer h, Brugha T et al. (2009) Adult Psychiatric Morbidity in England, 2007: Results of a household survey. leeds: nhs Information centre for health and social care.
3. Department of health (2009) Departmental Report 2009: The Health and Personal Social Services Programmes, available at: www.official- documents.gov.uk/document/cm75/7593/7593.pdf 95
4. Chevalier A, Feinstein I (2006). Sheepskin or Prozac: The causal effect of education on mental health. discussion paper. london: centre for Research on the Economics of Education, london school of Economics, available at: http://cee.lse.ac.uk/cee%20dps/ceedp71.pdf
5. Meltzer h, Bebbington P, Brugha T et al. Job insecurity, socio-economic circumstances and depression. Psychological Medicine 2010:40(8): 1401–1407.
6. Mccrone P, Dhanasiri S, Patel A et al. Paying the Price: The cost of mental health care in England. london: king's Fund 2008; 220–226.
7. Kessler R, Wang P. The descriptive epidemiology of commonly occurring mental disorders in the United States. Annual Review of Public Health 2007;29: 115–129.
8. Brown S, Kim M, Mitchell C, Inskip H. Twenty-five year mortality of a community cohort with schizophrenia. British Journal of Psychiatry; 2010;196: 116–121
9. Department of Health (2011) No Health without Mental Health: a Cross-Government Mental Health Outcomes Strategy for People of all Ages www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_123766(accessed 17 May 2016)
10. Government office for science (2008) Mental Capital and Wellbeing: Making the most of ourselves in the 21st century – Final project report, available at: http://tinyurl.com/ Foresight Report Mental Capital.
11. Department of health (2010) New Horizons – Confident communities, brighter futures: A framework for developing well-being, available at: http://tinyurl.com/ con communities Brighter Futures