

NEURO-REHABILITATION IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD

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Neurorehabilitation is a comprehensive medical science which aims to facilitate recovery from a nervous system injury and to minimize and/or compensate for any functional damage resulting from it. In case of a serious disability, such as that caused by a severe spinal injury or extensive brain damage, the patient and his/her family suddenly find their world come crashing down along with all their plans, hopes and aspirations. It is imperative that the person and all others who are affected pick themselves up quickly and discover a "new way of living".

Developing countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka all face the same problem-- a huge population with an inadequate number of skilled and trained neurorehabilitation specialists. The awareness of and need for neurorehabilitation is dismally poor both among the general population and healthcare givers. The gap between the need and supply of rehabilitation services is astonishingly high in these countries. The multidisciplinary teams of highly qualified and motivated practitioners experienced in teamwork in a dedicated set up are scanty even in the big cities of these countries.

While the concept of rehabilitation is not new in India, it's modern face is being shaped by the principles of neuroplasticity, a new concept that is being increasingly accepted the world over. Rehabilitation is no longer viewed as a luxury of the rich. It is now regarded as essential for the masses as well. The BYL Nair Hospital in Mumbai is India's first public hospital to have a comprehensive, multidisciplinary neurorehabilitation centre which was established 13 years ago. Regrettably, there are only a handful of similar modern rehabilitation centers equipped with state of the art instruments and teams of skilled speech, occupational and physical therapists that can be considered as centers of excellence.

On a positive note, individual therapists are available to serve the rural population. These trained personnel play an important role in bridging the gap between rehabilitation services available in urban and rural areas. They teach simple home care skills to close relatives of the patient, enabling them to act as trainers. These family members are instrumental in providing ongoing rehabilitation support and in this way, the family becomes closely involved in the rehabilitation process. (Family Based Rehabilitation). This saves time and money and lends emotional and social support to the rehabilitation process. The much touted community based rehabilitation model advocated by the west has, in fact, been operational and successful in India for several centuries.

The concept of neurorehabilitation gained recognition in Pakistan after the Earthquake in 2005, when authorities realized that it was a neglected speciality with very few skilled professionals capable of handling the enormous disability. There are very few multidisciplinary centers existing in Pakistan. No training centers or courses in neurorehabilitation are available, Hence there is a real and urgent need for such centers throughout the country.

Unlike India where the ancient techniques of Yoga and Ayurveda have been practised for centuries by Indian families and rituals like Suryanamaskar have become part of the daily routine, Pakistan has not adopted these practices. Scientific studies on the impact of yoga on neurological illnesses have shown efficacy in stroke, Parkinson's disease, Multiple Sclerosis and other disorders. Knowledge of these ancient techniques has been traditionally passed down from one generation to another. These ancient methods play a very important role in rehabilitation, especially neurorehabilitation and are accessible to the poorest of poor even in the remote and distant corners of India..

However Pakistan does possess an intricate social system and a strong family structure which provides the necessary physical, emotional and spiritual support to the patient. A sick person is not considered a burden; In fact, his close relatives regard it as an opportunity to serve him. The large joint family system ensures that the burden of disease and



rehabilitation is equally shared among its members.

The most significant aspect of rehabilitation in the developing world is that it is delivered through harmonious amalgamation of modern and ancient systems of medicine. A community oriented and family centered model of rehabilitation with a spiritual dimension certainly enhances the overall rehabilitation efforts. All we need to add is a scientific based modern trained multidisciplinary team to get the best possible outcome..

My recent visit to Karachi as Regional Vice President of World Federation for Neurological Rehabilitation (WFNR) was a truly memorable one indeed. I do sincerely hope that this visit act as a catalyst to activate Neurorehabilitation services in your great country.