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Impact of misinformation and politization of COVID-19 Implications for mental health

Dr. Siva Prakash, Specialist Psychiatrist, NMC Healthcare, Dubai

AIM

To identify extent of misinformation in subjects availing psychiatric services at NMC Healthcare Clinic as well as in non clinic population regarding causes, treatments, outcome and prevention of corona virus COVID-19 infection and its impact on mental health.

METHODS

This paper is based on our experience of observations on both clinic and nonclinic population attending psychiatry services at NMC Healthcare unit in Dubai in the first quarter of 2020, of COVID related concerns and its implications. It seems that in no other epoch in history has there been such rampant misinformation and politicization of an illness underscoring the complex relationship between science, politics and public opinion. The sample for this survey consisted of subjects seeking help for anxiety and depressive disorder at psychiatry services as well as others who accompany them (non-clinic population). A semi structured interview format was used to elicit awareness regarding COVID-19 and its impact. .

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RESULTS

Almost everyone author encountered appeared to be an expert on COVID, such is the power of how facts are presented in the media. The impact of individuals adaptation in dealing with the everchanging reality obviously resulted an increase in incidence of anxiety disorders - during this period there was almost three fold increase in new cases registered in psychiatry services at this centre, thereby increasing the demand on counseling and psychoeducational services. Analyzing their responses pointed towards inadequate moral and ideological commitments on the part of stake holders, opening up the need for accountability at various levels. Analysis of secondary data led to some interesting observations in clinic population. In many individuals both with depressive disorders and obsessive compulsive disorders impact of COVID pandemic appeared to bestow some positive adaptation - far from feeling worse they seemed better. A possible explanation in that they probably found relief from personal demons while dealing with the common enemy represented by virus.

CONCLUSIONS

Spread of misinformation appears to be masking healthy behaviours and promoting practices which result in poor physical and mental health outcomes. Regulation of social medial platforms to ensure fact checking, along with involvement of mass media, healthcare organizations and stake holders in healthcare delivery for disseminating authentic public health information with regard to COVID-19 in urgently needed.