

## EDITORIAL

The world is going through an unprecedented health challenge. With almost all countries across the globe coming under the spell of Corona virus, the impact is at individual, social and national levels. The initial phase of the pandemic engaged people in understanding the concept, managing the informational overflow, handling the anxiety, adapting to various new demands generated by COVID and associated lockdown.

The psychological state of the people took a toll because of the unforeseen circumstances. Sensing the need for the services of Health Psychologists, the Association of Health Psychologists collaborated with a number of organizations and set up helplines in the States of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, West Bengal and Karnataka. Hundreds of volunteers were enrolled. Some of the helplines functioned 24X7. Anyone from India and abroad could call the helpline number. There was tremendous response. Thousands of calls have been pouring in and handled with great professionalism. In the first two months, the nature of problems was found to be high levels of health anxiety and there was a clear indication of a phenomenon of ‘the fear of unknown’. Perception of severity and susceptibility of COVID-19 was found leading to health anxiety. The levels varied from mild anxiety to acute panic attacks. Insomnia was found to be very common among the callers. The second source of anxiety was found to originate from information overflow through social media and news channels. Inability to screen the authentic from the rumours placed people in a fix giving rise to what can be termed as ‘information processing anxiety’.

The need for inculcation of new set of health behaviour such as maintaining social distance, frequent sanitization, and wearing masks created what can be termed as ‘compliance anxiety’. The fourth source of anxiety was collapse of the physical boundary between home and work place, leading to new challenges of time management and space management amidst what can be termed as ‘home crowding’ due to the presence of all family

members all the time at home. A number of calls related to experiences of interpersonal problems and 'work-home balance'.

This is the time when the services of Health Psychologists are very appropriate. Patients diagnosed with COVID, family members, those in quarantine, those on the road to recovery and health professionals along the hierarchy are very much in need of the services of Health Psychologists. It is quite encouraging to note that Health Psychologists from across the country raised to the occasion and offered their services to the nation.

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