IMAGE OF PSYCHIATRY AMONG MEDICAL COMMUNITY

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SUMMARY

Psychiatry as a medical discipline has been variously described. Even among medical community psychiatry was looked down upon as medical speciality. After World War II when psychiatry's importance was realised for total treatment, its image was supposed to have improved. In the light of these ups and downs a survey of medical community consisting of 5000 doctors was conducted results of which reveal that the role of psychiatry is favourable. Respondent's comments and criticism were constructive and consistent. Important facts highlighted by this survey are that the undergraduate training in psychiatry is inadequate and the general public carries a frightening image about psychiatry according to the medical men. Therefore, it is suggested that medicos need more exposure to psychiatry and undergraduate training in psychiatry needs to be revised.

Unlike other medical disciplines, Psychiatry has had its ups and downs in terms of popularity and image. In the late 19th century when Psychiatry came into existence its image was perhaps the worst. The introduction of dynamic psychiatry as a medical speciality by Sigmund Freud was not well received by his medical colleagues and his concept of infantile sexuality and his use of hypnosis as a therapeutic tool were considered distasteful by both physicians and laymen (Jones, 1953).

Another negative point was the tendency of Freud and his associates to isolate themselves from the rest of medical community even though most of them were originally trained as neurologists. This led many people to feel that psychiatry was more of a cult than a speciality and created a worryness about its effectiveness and integrity. To some extent, this tendency towards isolation still exists.

After world war II, psychiatry emerged as an useful medical discipline for the total treatment of the patient. Even with this new acceptance, psychiatrists continued to be closely associated with Neurology and referred to as Neuro-psychiatrists. It has been only in the past four decades that psychiatry has emerged as a separate entity. It has been suggested that the influence of Adolf Meyer's psychobiologic approach has helped to make psychiatry more acceptable as a medical speciality (Harper, 1965).

Anti-psychiatry movement has challenged the existence of psychiatry. Thomas Szasz (1979) points out that the 'Patient' who is not truly ill, cannot be cured. He can only be bullied, exploited and ultimately terrorised.

In India, where priorities are different mental health has received low priority. Till recently, psychiatry in India was by and large confined to the mental hospitals only. The growth and development of general hospital psychiatry units in India has been considered an important change in Psychiatry (Wig, 1978) though it was resented by many quarters of medical community as 'mental hospitals coming to general hospitals'.

This concern provides a stimulus for a study on image of psychiatry among the medical community which includes resident doctors, general practitioners, specialists and medical teachers. These medical personnel include all others except psychiatrists. 'Image' for our study purpose has been taken from Burrow's (1924) Social image which is de-

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fined as an effective impression representing crystallised opinions, beliefs and prejudices which are deeply ingrained in the individual and in the society but for which there is no objective demonstrable correspondence in actuality. These emotionally toned impressions have no direct relation to object or situation upon which they are projected the social image is wishfully determined and is not based upon demonstrable reality (Burrow, 1924).

**MATERIAL AND METHOD**

To meet the proposed objective a semi-structured questionnaire was prepared to cover various aspects of psychiatry. This questionnaire, which has eight items, was sent to medical teachers, specialists working in different hospitals and the resident doctors of various medical institutions of Punjab, Haryana and Union Territories of Delhi and Chandigarh. Private practitioners of these areas were also contacted through this questionnaire by post. All these doctors had exposure to psychiatry at some stage or the other. Purpose of the study was explained and the responses were kept anonymous to encourage candid opinions.

The content of questionnaire was designed to gain information on (i) How physicians regard psychiatry as a medical speciality, (ii) Whether physicians considered psychiatry helpful in treating patients, (iii) Whether physicians share knowledge with psychiatrists by referring patients to them, (iv) What in physician's opinion is the image of psychiatry in a layman's mind.

To test the reliability of this questionnaire

**Table—I**

| Question                                      | Residents (%) | General Practitioners (%) | Specialists/ Medical Teachers (%) |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Does Psychiatry have Scientific basis      | Yes 94.48(N 600) 91.21(2108) 87.8(N 180) | No 5.59(N 035) 8.75(202) 12.2(25) |
| 2. Does Psycho-therapy help                   | Yes 84.14(535) 99.70(2280) 68.29(N 140) | No 15.86(100) 1.30(30) 31.71(65) |
| 3. Does Psychiatry give undue importance to sex | Yes 21.26(135) 77.92(1000) 65.38(135) | No 78.74(500) 22.08(510) 34.14(70) |
| 4. Are drug-addicts and Alcoholics psychologically ill | Yes 97.64(N 0620) 86.9(N 2009) 87.8(N 180) | No 2.36(N 15) 13.1(N 301) 12.2(N 125) |
| 5. Psychiatry as perceived by laymen according to Medical men | As other specialties Frightening 76.38(N 485) 86.92(N 2008) 69.76(143) | | |
| 6. Do Psychiatrists give enough time to their patients | More than required 64.41(390) 0.26(N 6) 1.95(4) | Just adequate 33.07(N 210) 82.42(1904) 49.27(N 101) | |
| | Inadequate 4.72(N 30) 17.32(400) 19.50(N 49) | |  |
| | Do not know 0.75(N 35) 4.39(N 10) 0(N 0) | |  |
| 7. Do you refer patients to Psychiatrists      | Yes 94.48(N 600) 86.9(2009) 68.29(N 140) | No 5.52(N 35) 13.1(N 301) 31.71(65) |
| 8. Is undergraduate Psychiatry training adequate | Yes 4.23(N 27) 0.40(N 9) 3(N 6) | No 96.75(608) 99.60(2301) 97(199) |
a pilot work was conducted on ten subjects before administering to the subjects of study and certain modifications were made.

RESULT

A total of 5000 questionnaire were sent. The response rate was 63% (N = 3150), residents-63.5% (N = 635), private practitioners-64.17% (N = 2310) and medical teachers/specialists-51.25% (N = 205). This response is sufficient to be considered representative of the group surveyed. The responses obtained are tabulated in Table-1

DISCUSSION

Results were interesting and informative. Despite the fact there are some differences in the philosophies of private practitioners and the academicians, the responses were basically consistent. All the three groups of doctors acknowledge the scientific basis of psychiatry and also believe in efficacy of psychotherapy. Alcoholics and drug addicts are recognised as psychologically ill by all the three groups. General practitioners and medical teachers in a significant majority feel that the psychiatrists give undue importance to sex while residents have a feeling that the psychiatrists give undue more time to their patients but specialists and general practitioners on the other hand feel that the time spent is adequate enough. Whenever need is felt all the three groups refer patients to psychiatrists.

Two very interesting facts have come to light. One is that the doctors feel that the laymen carry a frightening image of psychiatry which they might be seeing in resistance of the patients to go to psychiatrists whenever they are referred to. Secondly, undergraduate training of psychiatry is not adequate to deal effectively with patients. This is a consistent response seen with all three groups of medicos.

The results of this survey reveal that the image of psychiatry within the medical community is quite good. However, psychiatry has to improve its image in laymen’s mind. Psychiatric training to undergraduate students needs to be revised to deal with psychiatric problems more effectively.

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