



Mental Health & Suicide Prevention Initiative (Reaching Out, Saving Lives), Singtam District Hospital, East Sikkim

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Introduction

An estimated that 6-7 % of population suffers from mental disorders. The global burden of disease (GBD) due to neuropsychiatric disorder is 12% predicted to increase to 15% by 2020 (World Health Report, 2001). One in four families is likely to have at least one member with a behavioral or mental disorder (WHO 2001). These families not only provide physical and emotional support, but also bear the negative impact of stigma and discrimination.¹ Most of them (>90%) remain un-treated. Poor awareness about symptoms of mental illness, myths & stigma related to it, lack of knowledge on the treatment availability & potential benefits of seeking treatment are important causes for the high treatment gap. The District Mental Health Cell of Singtam District Hospital, East Sikkim initiated several activities to fight against stigma and discrimination by strengthening primary health care system in the provision of mental health service at the community. This article highlights the endeavor of Singtam District, East Sikkim in

developing mental health & substance dependence service delivery system.

The objectives of Singtam District Mental Health (East District) unit are as follows

- Promotion of Positive Mental Well-being
- Prevention & treatment of mental illness & substance misuse including tobacco & alcohol.
- Capacity building of available health workers & other stakeholders
- Integrating mental health services in Primary Health Care System
- Taking mental health services to the doorsteps of rural population

Developmental milestone milestones of Singtam DMHP unit till date

- Mental health team comprising of Psychiatrist cum Addiction Medicine Specialist, Psychologist and Mental Health Social Worker posted at Singtam District Hospital.
- District Counseling Center established to make service provision for counseling

services to mentally ill clients and offer formal counseling services to people with mental health problems and stress related disorders.

3. Special Psychiatric OPD services have been made available daily
4. Special De-addiction OPD services are run to make service provision to clients with alcoholism, and substance dependence/abuse.²
5. A special Tobacco Cessation Clinic (TCC) service was also established to offer / help people to quit tobacco/ smoking.
6. Adolescent Counseling services with separate counselors has been started in the premises of District Counseling Center to offer special services to juveniles or children below 18 years of age to provide structured therapy and counseling services.
7. The Singtam District Hospital has also started outreach OPD clinic in 5 Primary Health Centers (Rhenock, Rongli, Samdong, Sang, and Pakyong) wherein mental health team from District Hospital conducts Psychiatric OPD Clinic at designated PHCs.
8. All the 7 PHC have started psychiatric clinic wherein concerned medical officers are offering mental health cum counseling services to patients.
9. Mobile Watapps Helpline services for case discussion of mentally ill patients by medical officers have been established wherein medical officers can contact Psychiatrist 24X7 for advises to help patients at PHC.
10. The Singtam District Hospital also initiated several campaigns such as Winning Ways to Well Being Campaign in Schools and Colleges, Peer Educators Programs at Singtam/ Sirwani Schools, Women's Mental Health Campaign, Community Mental Health Campaign, East District Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, East District Mental

Health Awareness Month, Mental Well Being Campaign for Winter Coaching Camps, East District Substance Abuse Prevention Week to educate general public/ students / women/ children on mental health, mental illness, and harmful effects of tobacco, alcohol and substance misuse.

11. Mobile Mental Health unit (MMHU) has been integrated with Mobile Medical Unit team of Singtam District Hospital wherein Mental Health Social Worker visits rural areas to conduct IEC (Information, education, and Communication) cum counseling services.
12. Social awareness campaign through facebook page called "Grameen Manasik Swastha Abhiyan" to educate general public on different types of mental illness, treatment availability, and harmful effects of alcohol, tobacco and substance misuse and highlight the initiatives undertaken by DMHP for promotion and prevention of mental health.³
13. The Singtam DMHP Cell in collaboration with State NCD Cell organized "Marathon" from Rangpo to Singtam on 13 Nov 2016 to generate awareness on suicide prevention and suicide helpline toll free number.
14. The Singtam District Mental Health Cell has imparted training to all the Medical officers (PHC/ DH), Health Education officers, nurses, MPHWS, ASHA and other paramedical staffs to develop their skills/ capacity to recognize mentally ill clients in the community and offer help to seek proper help by mental health experts.³
15. Referral services between PHC, PHSC and DH have been strengthened for mentally ill clients and people with substance abuse. A taxi fare for clients and family members are being provided for follow up care.
16. The Singtam District Hospital is also collaborating with Police Training Center,

Yangyang to train police officers on mental health issues. In 2017, approximately 450 Police officers were imparted training on mental health.

17. Opioids Substitution Therapy (OST Center) for the treatment of patients with substance dependence (Spasmaproxyvon, Heroin, Morphine, Pentazocine, Brown Sugar and other opioids related drugs) is functional at Singtam Hospital.

18. Basic Psychiatric Medicine for BPL patients have been made available free of cost for the treatment of depression, anxiety disorders, suicidal behavior, psychosis, bipolar disorder, epilepsy, and alcohol and substance withdrawal.

19. Sikkim Pledge Campaign

Hon'ble Health Minister Shri Arjun Kumar Ghatani launched a very innovative campaign called "Pledge Campaign". Though the Deptt. Of Health is continuously striving to promote Mental Health services in the State, clients with suicidal behavior in times of crisis don't access psychiatry services due to very high stigma attached to mental illness in the world. Suicide in adolescents is another big challenge because they usually share all their problems with their peers only. " PLEDGE CAMPAIGN" targeted schools & colleges to encourage students to help their peers in times of stress, failures, problems and difficult times simply by connecting them to available resources at Schools, Health Services and significant others. The Singtam District conducted Pledge Campaign in 38 Schools and in all the training programs.

20. Women's Mental Health Campaign

Women are at high risk of mental health problems owing to different roles and responsibilities in society. She is a daughter, daughter in law, mother, sister, and wife and also due to economic needs; significant number of women are in

occupation/jobs to provide financial support to their family. WHO reported that 1 out of 5 women suffers from mental health problems during lifetime. They are most vulnerable to mental health problems during pregnancy. Since ASHA are working for the health of rural women population, we would like to include mental health component in ANC/ PNC package. The concept behind this special campaign is because 90% of human brain develops inside mother's womb. The objectives of Ante-natal care (ANC) and MCH (Mother & Child Services) is not only to protect the child & mother from infections, malnutrition, low birth weight, & other complications of pregnancy but facilitate pregnant women to deliver mentally healthy newborn child. A child's learning actually starts inside mother's womb because their ears can listens to all the sounds / stimulus. Therefore, parents should be very careful about their language & behavior because babies are very smarter than us with a very good learning capacity. If the environment of home is very peaceful with good understanding, love & respect between parents, child will develop virtues of trust, and love. Therefore, it is very imperative to adopt healthy behavior or mentality to teach our children to develop them into positive social human being with good moral/ social conscience. WOMEN MENTAL HEALTH campaign was implemented by Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) in respective ICDS Centers to reproductive age group mothers. ASHA were imparted training on positive mental health, common mental illness, causes of suicide, domestic violence, alcoholism, drug abuse, parenting skills and child personality development. After training ASHA were supported with resources (Rs 700 each) to

conduct similar campaign in respective ICDS centres.⁴

21. The DMHP imparted training to 2270 health workers, teachers, police officers, NGOs, peer educators and nursing students and other stakeholders between Apr 2014 to Mar 2017.
22. A total of 873 mental health programs were conducted in last 3 years in East District.

Conclusion

DMHP is all about empowering and strengthening of Primary Care Workers and community by building capacity/ skills to take mental health services to the doorsteps of people so that clients are identified, treated and follow-up at the community by means of effective primary health care and mental health service delivery system.

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