



Role of Social Workers for Cardiac Care

Santosh Kumar Raju

The unprecedented industrialization and urbanization of our society, with consequent changes in the life style of our people leading to enhanced stress and strain, have resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of heart attacks. It affects bodily organs through several psycho physical mechanisms. The progress of medical science has helped us to conquer number of communicable diseases but not able to control the several psychosomatic diseases. Among the several psychosomatic diseases cardiovascular disorder is one of them.

Now a days cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the leading cause of death and disability in many developing countries. The important factors that accelerate coronary artery narrowing are due to excess of fats and cholesterol in the blood, high blood pressure, overweight, diabetes and smoking. It is also known that depression, anxiety, anger, emotional stress and physical inactivity increase the risk for cardiac disorders in patients with coronary heart disease.

Alfred Grotjahn of Berlin in 1915 developed many ideas of investigations of medical problems in the light of social science issues. He stressed the importance of social factors in the aetiology of disease which he called Social Pathology. Rene Sand who founded the Belgian

School Medicine Association had rediscovered that man is not only a biological animal but also a social animal and disease has social cause, social consequences. It indicates the social concern to the all round development of the human being, as the aetiology of ill health lies in the malfunctioning of the social system in terms of poverty, ignorance, population explosion, unemployment, old age, unhygienic living conditions, bad housing, poor nutrition and incompatible dietary habits, poor quality of drinking water and sanitary facilities, etc.

The need to understand social factors in health was recognized in 1905 when Richard Cabot established the Department of Medical Social Work at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. Dr. Cabot recognized that a patient's social situation affects the results of treatment. At that time social work and social communication was confined primarily to inpatient and outpatients attended the hospitals. As the practice of medicine has grown to be more psychosocial, the role of social workers, with their social functioning orientation has increased in importance.

The time has gone when the doctor used to deal patients personally and was responsible for their total care. Due to development of various diagnostic tools, techniques, to detected the



cardiovascular problems, it is resulted in loss of personal touch on the part of the doctors. The present situation of medical care includes coordination among the various team members of different specializations and paramedical and nursing staff, and on the other, a warm and personal humanitarian feel to the patient. Social workers with proper communication can fulfill this need. Also they make patients and their family members relieved from the stress involved in the heart problem and its care.

Scientific researches by World Health Organization have also shown that life style and behaviour are important catalysts in causing and preventing heart diseases. There are many factors considered responsible for cardiovascular diseases. These factors are stress and strain of life, tobacco, high cholesterol diet, high blood pressure, diabetes, heredity and lack of exercise. Medicine has acquired a vast body of knowledge and become highly technical. It has acquired new capabilities to modify and perhaps control the capabilities and activities of man by direct intervention into and manipulation of their bodies and mind, viz; counseling.

The last few decades have shown that social and economic factors have as much influence on health as medical interventions. So the social scientists and the medical scientists have to understand a disease very significantly. Social scientists generalize the phenomenon of disease and try to find its cause in poverty, malnutrition, poor sanitation, lack of education, inadequate housing, unemployment, and poor working conditions, cultural and behavioural factors which are the cause of ill health. All these factors have an important effect on the provision of health care to all strata of society.

Soon however, it was realized that the cardiac problems that we are facing today are so

complex that the traditional motivation approach i.e. through books, journals, newspapers, posters, booklets are insufficient to achieve the behavioural change of the people. Due to illiteracy it is found that people will not readily accept and try something new or novel idea until it has been promoted by interpersonal communication because print media is still not reachable near the mass.

The revolutionary changes in communication and information technology made media the most potent means of mass education and mass mobilization in the world. Still social media now influence all works of our life i.e. social and personal. Health development is need of the hour for our society. So the quest for health development must lead us in the direction of empowering those sections of society who are in the need of or to be informed.

Today's print media is itself class oriented, tending to increase division between social groups. It creates a gap between literacy and illiteracy. Information rich and information poor has widened the Indian Media therefore, living in a situation where it does not know where to go. To survive, it has to follow the lead being given by the social media. To live up to its tradition it has to show commitment for those sections of society who are becoming information starved.

To prevent the occurrence of heart disease, preventive message stating how does cholesterol get deposited in the wall of the arteries, from where does cholesterol come, why are high levels of cholesterol produced in the blood, which arteries are the most affected and what are the risk factors involved in the production of atheroma should be communicated to the society. So it can create awareness among the people with information. The message should reach near the



patients to put efforts of secondary prevention to prevent further deterioration of the situation.

So social workers participation in health care as medical social worker, addressing various psychosocial dimensions of patients to the society is the major requirement of today. The function of the social worker is to treat the social complications of disease by establishing a close relationship between the hospitals and patients by relieving their tension or the stress and strain of life. How the patient will change his life style to get relief from the heart attack should be the main thrust area of the social workers. The recommendations of doctors which can be made from present knowledge of the causation of heart disease, especially heart attacks and hypertension which are the biggest killers in the society should be communicated to the patients along with the psychological aspects of diseases. Social work is now a major discipline contributing to these programmes through appropriate interventive measures. Moreover, the role of the social workers, because of involvement with front line community activities, is particularly suited to make a substantial contribution to this trend. Social worker, Ida Cannon believed that medical practice could not be effective without examining the link between illness and social conditions of the patients. So better social communication is highly necessary for social workers. Because, social communication is a planned activity, based on the one hand on participatory process, and on the other hand on media and interpersonal communication, which facilitates a dialogue among different community members, around a common problem or goal, with the objective of developing and implementing a set of activities to contribute

to its solution. If cardiac care is to be our goal, this close link should be emphasized and operationalized between communication and the people who are suffering from cardiac problems or people taking cardiac care.

In this regard, The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) also recognized the importance of the environment and peripheral surroundings of the people on their health and considered health as a function not only of medical care but of the overall integrated development of society- cultural, economic, educational, social and political.

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Santosh Kumar Raju, Researcher, Utkal University, Bhubaneswar.

The childhood shows the man, as morning shows the day. – *Milton*