

Mental Health Care Bill 2013 to bring paradigm shift

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The Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare, Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad inaugurated the 7th Congress of Asian Society for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Allied Professionals, and the 12th Biennial Conference of Indian Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health.

Quoting a study conducted by the Indian Council of Medical Research Shri Azad said that in India the rate of psychiatric disorders in children aged between 4 to 16 years is about 12% and nearly one-third of the population is less than 14 years of age. He noted that similar studies from all over the world have indicated that around 15% of children suffer from significant mental health problems, affecting their functioning. Studies from Asia have shown that 10-20% of children and adolescents have significant health problems.

The Central Government has revised and focused on two major components of the National Mental Health Programme in the just concluded 11th five year plan (2007-2012). The Minister stated that the Mental Health Care Bill, 2013, which has been introduced in the parliament to replace the old Mental Health Act, 1987 will bring about a paradigm shift in the area of mental health. The Mental Health Care Bill is currently being examined by parliamentary Standing Committee.

The Health Minister said that the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), Bangalore which has become an 'Institution of National Importance' will mentor and support Child and Adolescent Mental Health services that will be started at the six new AIIMS and the Centres of Excellence under the National Mental Health Programme. He also highlighted the Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK) initiative of Health Ministry, which was launched in February, 2013. The programme aims to provide universal screening and comprehensive healthcare to children between 0 to 18 years of age and will eventually cover 270 million children.

The three day conference was attended by 110 foreign delegates from 24 countries and psychiatrists from India. This is the first time the conference is being held in India. Also, present at the function were Dr Yogesh Chawla, Director, PIGMER and senior officers from the Ministry and representatives from the Indian Society of Psychiatry and Indian Society for Social

Psychiatry.