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The George Institute for Global Health received funding to bridge the mental health gap in India

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The funding received was a part of a $53 million announcement by Greg Hunt MP, Minister for Health, into new research for better treatments, prevention and care for people in both Australia and worldwide facing mental health challenges



The George Institute for Global Health has been granted around $2 million from the NHMRC Global Alliance for Chronic Diseases for an innovative program ‘SMART Mental Health’.

This programme is aimed at improving the treatment of mental health issues in India and overcoming stigma. It will address the burden of common mental health disorders, such as anxiety, depression, and stress, which affect one in four people in India, and also lead to addressing the increased risk of suicide associated with such conditions.

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The George Institute for Global Health is improving the lives of millions of people worldwide through innovative health research. Working across a broad health landscape, the Institute conducts clinical, population and health system research aimed at changing health practice and policy worldwide. The Institute has been ranked among the top 10 global institutes for impact for the last several years.

The George Institute India partners with over sixty national and international institutions such as the All India institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, the Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, University of Hyderabad; and affiliations with University of New South Wales, Oxford and Peking.

Dr Pallab Maulik, Principal investigators, The George Institute for Global Health India & Professor David Peiris, Deputy Director of The George Institute for Global Health Sydney said, “There was a pressing need to close the gap between the growing burden of mental disorders and lack of treatment for them all over the world, including low and middle-income countries like India.”

The project will be built upon a recently completed pilot that showed promising reductions in social stigma, depression, and anxiety levels.

Dr Pallab Maulik explained, “If you have a mental health issue in India, there is a very high chance you won’t receive any treatment due to a lack of trained health professionals. Statistics reveal there is just one psychologist for every two million people.”

“There is also a lack of awareness and increased stigma related to mental health in India so our program focuses on tackling both of these problems, by providing health workers with a mobile tool that enables better diagnosis and better management of these conditions as well as running community awareness campaigns”, he added

The NHMRC Global Alliance for Chronic Diseases grant received will help The George Institute for Global Health in conducting a large randomised trial in both North and South India involving 20 primary health care centres. The main aim of the program is to develop a successful model within existing healthcare system that can be adopted by the government.

Under this program, the villages taking part in the trial will receive pamphlets and multi-media resources to show the benefits of getting treatment to generate discussions around mental health. Healthcare workers will be provided mobile health technologies that will help in personalised clinical decision support.

Professor Peiris said, “We hope that more people in India will not only start talking about mental health, they will also be able to receive better treatments and have their conditions properly managed. Also, if the results looks promising, the strategy could impact the lives of millions of Indians on a daily basis and will be relevant to other countries with similar health system challenges"