

Long Term Care and Palliative Care

Long term care is generally defined as the care of an elder or individual with a disability who requires on-going assistance with activities of daily living, such as bathing, dressing, grooming, eating, toileting, transferring, shopping and cooking. LTC services provide support to clients and their families with medical, personal, and social services delivered over a sustained period of time.

It is “An approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their family facing the problems associated with life threatening illness, through the privations and reliefs of offering early identification, assessments and treatments”.

In India, the Long term care and Palliative care have been part of family and socio-cultural system, but with the changing social scenario and value system, there is a need to change our approach towards Palliative Care which is also changing and the institutionalized Palliative care is gaining ground but its quality and access needs to be improved. The concept of Long term care and Palliative care is relatively new to India, having been introduced in late 1980's. Since then hospices and Palliative care services have developed through the efforts of committed individuals, including Indian health professionals as well as volunteers, in collaboration with international organizations.

The obstacles in the growth of Long term care and Palliative care in India are many and include factors like population, density, poverty, geographical diversity and restrictive government policies. The specific challenges faced by elderly people in accessing long term care are:

- Insufficient infrastructure
- Changing family system and values
- Inadequate social support
- Unawareness, limited accessibility and affordability of healthcare
- Financial dependency

In India, the social stigma is also attached to the social unacceptability of leaving older people in centres for Long term care and Palliative care. According to the 2011 census, 71% of the elderly live in rural India. Despite constant efforts by the government and NGOs, the health care facilities in rural India are insufficient therefore people have to travel to urban areas for medical facilities. Because of poor connectivity, the medical facilities are inaccessible in rural area, where disparity and neglect are major issues. The children migrate for livelihood which leave the parents neglected in the rural area. Over 5% of the elderly in the country have functionality issues necessitating regular care and support. Around 8% require assistance to perform at least one ADL. Approx. 18% rate their health as poor. In general, older women have greater difficulty in performing ADLs than men.

Social divisions such as caste, religion, sex, social status etc. affect the palliative care in India. Diversity of cultural beliefs and the health practices affects the acceptance of type of health care and interventions. In recent times women empowerment has caught pace, promoting elderly women to be self-sufficient and independent by utilising their skills in cottage industries. There have been several initiatives in India to empower them by engaging them in production of Pickles and other items traditionally popular in Indian households.

There is an urgent need for progressive health care system; all the restrictive practices such as detention, seclusion and physical restraints have to be eliminated. The system has to be made user friendly and should fulfil the needs and aspirations of the elderly people.

The state is making financial provisions for the long term sustainability of the health care system along with creation of permanent support system providing health insurance for poor, elderly and challenged population in India.

In case of abuse and violations of the elderly, there are legal provisions such as “Maintenance & Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act” 2007.

The Government of India has made budgetary provisions, policies which help in providing Long Term Care of the elderly. Some of these policies are mentioned below:

- 1) NPOP (National Policy for Older Persons)
- 2) IPOP (Integrated Programme for Older Persons)
- 3) Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana
- 4) National Program for Health Care of the Elderly
- 5) Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme

Various other factors affect of Long Term Care of senior citizens. One of the main is challenge is financial security, which gives a person the ability to pay for medical expenses and employ manpower for health assistance. Security can be provided by Insurances or other assistances. Financial security would provide autonomy and independence to the elderly to great extent.

Long term care is a right of every individual and it is the responsibility of the state to provide it. An increase in the research of diseases affecting the aged population is the requirement of the hour and should be looked into by the state. The best way to empower the elderly and assure long term care to them is by making them self-reliant and providing them the opportunity to gain financial security and through their experience contributing towards national growth.