Editorial

Psychiatric Social Work is a discipline whose importance is increasingly recognized in all modern countries. Even though Western culture is by and large individual-oriented and nuclear family is the prevailing norm in that culture, the value of Psychiatric Social Work in dealing with day-to-day clinical work with patients is well established there. How much more ought this to be the case in the Indian situation where the individual is intensely and intimately but not necessarily constructively-affiliated to his relevant social atom and where therapeutic work stretches over a far wider social network, inevitably touching on so many facets of the patient’s life within his extended family and in relation to the community, employer and others. Through direct contact with the clinical realities in India, it is becoming quite evident to me that by far the more effective route of bringing about desired changes in the patient’s psychological condition is by treating him as an indivisible part of his family unit rather than through interactions with him as an individual alone. If therapeautic enterprise in the context of Indian culture is viewed primarily this way, it is obvious that psychiatric social workers have a very significant and yet-to-evolve role to play.

The second large arena for the proper utilization of this discipline is in terms of modifying the existing psychosocial attitudes of the society in many parameters—not necessarily restricted to those relating to mental illness alone. No matter in which direction one looks—whether relating to attitudes toward work, or to methods of imparting learning, or to developing the much-needed standards of fair play and cooperation in any community or institutional undertaking, or of modifying the prevailing superstitions and prejudices of a myriad description—it is clear that there is a great deal to be done in terms of molding more wholesome and constructive psychosocial attitudes in the society.

In short, both in the context of therapy with psychiatric patients and of social therapy—if one chooses to designate changing of psychosocial attitudes in the community as that—the field of Psychiatric Social Work has a great deal to contribute to the Indian society at the present phase of its development.

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