

NEED AND NECESSITY OF DIGITAL HEALTH LITERACY IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Everyone must have heard the age-old proverb, 'Health is Wealth.' It was true many hundred years back and it is still very true in this Digital era. One can accomplish even the most difficult and next to impossible looking tasks if one is healthy. It is an enigma that modern man has indulged himself in procuring and amassing more and more wealth by hook or crook. He works overtime and indulge in theft, robbery and even distrusting others in order to possess more and more money. He breaks the trust of his near and dear ones by way of deception, fraud and cheating. This rat race of amassing more and more has left him with no time for looking after himself. He eats whatever comes his way. He has disturbed and irregular sleeping and getting up patterns. Even eating patterns are highly asymmetrical. Consumption of the present day popular Junk food, Packed Food, Fast Food, Bakery Items and Dairy Products have disturbed his stomach, liver, metabolism and intestine. Precisely speaking his digestive system stands greatly disturbed. He has little time for 8-10 kilometer walk, performing Yoga and doing exercises to keep him fit. The excess of refined wheat flour, refined oils, Ajinomoto and preservatives in food products and beverages has given a telling blow to his digestive system. That's why every human being is facing from one or the other disease. There were times when in traditional society when there was great thrust on physical work. In those days medical practitioners were very few and people never felt much need to approach any doctor as the ayurvedic formulas used to cure all minor diseases.

KEYWORDS: cunning, 'Health is Wealth.', metabolism and intestine, asymmetrical.

INTRODUCTION

Modern day man has become very cunning and selfish. He always keeps thinking how to ditch others. Climbing the stairs of success is no more the dividend of hard work but those who have approach get it done quite easily. Money and approach play a major role. As a result the modern man thinks too much. In fact he has become a busy person who does not even know that he has developed the habit of over thinking. This over thinking is the first sign of a person for a plethora of mental disorders to follow. Fast, Junk and packed food has destroyed his digestive system. Therefore there are enormous cases related to food consumption. People treat their stomach as if it is dust bin. There are rules for food consumption. The ignorance or careless attitude have resulted in disturbed stomach and slowing down of metabolism. It has resulted in a glut of ailments which have their roots in disturbed digestive system. From gastric and acidity to Liver disorders, diabetes, vision problems, bladder stone, Kidney failures, obesity, spinal cord related

problems, impotency and other sex related problems, hypertension, nervous disorders, PCOD, joint pains, uric acid, tuberculosis, Cancer etc. health problems have made the man unhealthy. The list of diseases is rather big to be mentioned here. Almost every human being is suffering from one or the other health problem. That is why one finds a number of Private Hospitals, Nursing Homes, and Super-specialty Hospitals over and above government run civil hospitals and dispensaries. The wards in hospitals are loaded with patients. All this is happening due to the lethargic life style and being unaware about health literacy. One must know that over thinking is the breeding ground for mental disorders and psychological problems. Civil hospitals organize free health check up camps but people have no time to even come for their check up. Those who get the tests done find that they have one or the other health issue. It makes the spread of health awareness essential, imperative and very crucial.

Communication and Mass Communication have been trying their level best to spread awareness about all types of diseases for many decades. It is particularly true about All India Radio and Doordarshan. Though the private TV channels telecast entertainment oriented programs yet every now and then these are discussions about some fatal diseases at least on news TV channels. Health communication pays great attention on the dissemination of meaningful matters related to health care. In fact health communication started in 4th century BC in ancient Greek civilization where Hippocrates started writing about diseases and their connection with environment. But the term Health Communication was first used by national Health Council in 1961. It was adopted by ICA in 1975. Putting in simple words, Health Communication means dissemination of health related information through Print and Electronic media. The emphasis is to improve the overall health of society through effective communication. The reason behind the Who and CDC putting emphasis on Health and family Welfare is to improve the longevity of life. They emphasize on long and healthy life. Medical infrastructure even in Government Hospitals has greatly improved.

As it is said that prevention is better than cure so the organizations like WHO put emphases on balanced and healthy diet. But even after tireless efforts of WHO and various Governments all over the World the fatality rate has increased. While most of the diseases are treatable but there is urgent need to pay attention to prevention and going for periodic full body health checkups. Timely detection of disease in its early stages saves the hard earned money and the life of the patient. Healthy lifestyle can avoid many risks. Overeating, eating of packed, junk and fast food, limiting smoking and reducing the intake of alcohol, routine exercises, morning walk, and sleeping patterns can lower the risk of many diseases. The industrial media had its geographical limitations for reaching out to people in far flung areas. But the advent of Digital Media has transcended all geographical boundaries. Now narrow national and geographical boundaries have become meaningless so far as the dissemination of information is concerned. Digital Media is based on Internet based technologies which needs computerized gadgets for receiving information.

In just about a quarter of a century, Digital Media has revolutionized the world of information communication. It is popularly called Media Information Revolution. Virtually every sort of information is available on Internet. Information is just a click away from you now. Digital Media necessitated the need of mobile phone service providers. The internet signal providing towers have mushroomed the urban areas and they have dotted the rural pockets also. One needs any computerized equipment to remain linked to this internet based communication. These equipments may be personal computers, Laptops, Tablets or Smart Phones. The markets all over

the world have been flooded with a huge range and variety of Smart Phones. India is no exception in this case. Social Media is an integral part of Digital Media.

There are a number of apps available on smart phone for the users. People are using these smart phones more than other equipments as it is easy to carry them anywhere. Social Media apps like WhatsApp, facebook, Instagram and Sharechat etc. proved enough opportunities to remain connected 24x7 with your friends and relatives. One can find friends from different regions and different countries with the help of these apps. Presently there are more than 650 million Internet users in India of which around 480 million users are active users of WhatsApp. The users of Facebook are also neck to neck with WhatsApp and at many places there are more facebook users. Instagram has become the heart throb of billions of users around the world. Then there are millions of users of Instagram, LinkedIn, twitter and YouTube. YouTube provides audio visual information for free on virtually any topic. There is no dearth of information on Internet. Then there are apps for money transactions, educational apps, lifestyle apps, game apps, Sports apps, entertainment apps etc. The list is endless. Google Maps has made travelling easier and hassle free. You have apps like zomato and swiggy etc through which you can order any food you need at your doorstep and that too without any additional charge. Oyo, Make My Trip and Goibibo etc. help you plan your vacation visits and you can book rooms for comfortable stay even before you start your actual journey. Phone pay, Paytm, Bhim and Google pay enable you to make or receive online payments. Then there are authentic and trustworthy online shopping apps which allow you to return the purchased product if you find it faulty. But there is a word of caution in the usage of these social media apps. Social Media rests on user generated content and there is no censorship on it. That is why there is abundance of misinformation and disinformation on social media. One needs to recheck the authenticity of information before sharing it with others or before trusting it himself.

But when it comes to Digital Health Literacy, social media can work wonders. In fact it has proved its potential during COVID pandemic. When the industrial media had its limitations it was only social media which disseminated information about the causes, precautions and cure of Covid-19. In fact it will not be exaggeration to give credit to Digital Media that the World was able to fight and win against the Pandemic. People used to get themselves registered for vaccination through social media and they would get e certificates after getting vaccinated. The same can stand true about other major or minor diseases. As it is already discussed that the reach and impact of this media is enormous so people rely on this media more than any other media of Mass Communication. Digital Media has proved to be a boon for humanity. Connectivity and communication with anyone from anywhere and at anytime is made possible by Digital Media.

In the case of natural calamities this media proves handy for rescue operations and for sending the teams of doctors to that particular area. The medical facility or advice is available at a single click. There are apps which give people useful and authentic information about every disease. Many Doctors write blogs on a number of medical issues. There are medical products which can be purchased on line. The only requirement is the up loading medical prescription of your doctor. Apart from making ayurvedic, allopathic or homoeopathic medicines available to people, these apps give proper information about their ingredients, formula and the doses to be taken. All this information comes with a warning that one should not indulge in self medication and one must take the advice of his/her doctor before taking the medicines. Then these sites also give proper information about the benefits, disadvantages, hindrances and side effects of the medicines. You can get information about the manufacturing pharmaceutical company of any medicine, medical description of salts and the rate of the medicine. All you need is to be cautious and stop yourself

from self medication which may cause irreparable damage to your body. This is something that was never available to the previous generations.

If we talk about critical diseases in India cardiovascular illness is a major life threatening disease. Due to high levels of Bad cholesterol one runs the risk of Heart disease. Many people have their veins blocked which need stunts or open heart surgery. There is urgent need to spread awareness about cardiovascular disease. Shortness of breath, Pain in chest, feeling discomfort and numbness in arms and legs are some of the symptoms. It may be due to poor diet, lethargic life style, obesity and family history. One must get his Lipid profile test, ECG and Echo test done at regular intervals. Regular exercises, controlled blood pressure, fiber-rich food, lots of salad and fruits intake may be the preventive measures. Then there are respiratory diseases. These diseases include asthma, tuberculosis and acute bronchitis. People above 20 are seen suffering from asthma while a variety of tuberculosis is very common among all age groups. Nasal congestion, cough, sneezing, sore throat etc are some of its symptoms. Dust, Smoking, Air Pollution, congenital and low immunity raise the risk of respiratory disease. Regular exercises, giving up smoking, respiratory hygiene, wearing mask and avoiding polluted areas can be among the preventive measures. Malignant and other tumors are often cancerous. They occur when the cells growing of cells become out of control. It is life threatening as there is no permanent cure of cancer so far. Yes, it can be treated if it is detected at early stage. CT Scans and MRI scans are needed to detect tumors. Tumors don't show any sign in the beginning. Just painless lumps can be counted among symptoms. Cancer may be due to genetic, exposure to toxic compounds and ionizing radiation. Weight management, quitting the intake of tobacco in any form and regular exercises may shield one from the danger of cancer. Diarrhea is another disease which occurs due to upset stomach or liver. One passes watery stools which may lead to dehydration and it further reduces salt and water levels in the body of the patient. Loose watery stools, nausea, abdominal pains and numerous bowel movements are some of the symptoms. Intake of impure water, malnourishment and poor sanitization may be counted among causes. Patient must stop taking Aspirin and steroids, stop the intake of alcohol and ensure hygiene can prevent this disease.

Diabetes is one of the most life threatening diseases. Every 4th person in India suffers from it. India is called the capital of diabetes. Often people think that excess intake of sweets, particularly, sugar, causes diabetes but it may be genetic or the cause of stressful life style. Its medicinal name is diabetes Mellitus. It is of TWO types. Type-I diabetes is the condition when pancreas stops producing insulin. In case of diabetes-II insulin is produced but it is not used effectively. As a result the amount of glucose gets out of control in the blood which may cause Kidney failure, black fungus, blindness or it may damage Liver also. Its symptoms include excessive thirst, frequent urination, fatigue, too much hunger and unexpected sudden weight loss. Causes of diabetes may include stress, prolonged high blood pressure, obesity, fast foods, excess sugar intake, unhealthy diet and sluggish life style. Regular exercises, long and fast walking, active life style, decreasing the intake of carbohydrates, more intake of fiber and saying goodbye to smoking can help one control the sugar levels. But this disease has no permanent cure so far. Liver disease is also becoming very common these days. Liver is the largest organ of our body. It is the engine that keeps the train of life running. It produces bile which is necessary for the body. Liver disease includes Fatty Liver, Liver Fibrosis, Liver Cirrhosis and Liver Cancer. It is of two types i.e. Alcoholic Liver Disease and Non Alcoholic Liver Disease. ALD is mainly caused by excessive intake of alcohol for a long period of time as well as unhealthy food. NALD is caused by excessive intake of pain killers, antibiotics and steroids. Many a times diabetes also becomes

a cause of Liver disease. Among its symptoms pain in right shoulder, pain in right side below chest, excessive or no hunger, yellowish urine, black stools, sluggish life and accumulation of water in abdomen are included. In order to avoid it one must take exercise daily, increase the intake of fruits and salad, stop poultry, confectionary and dairy products, wheat, rice, packed food, junk food, fast food, oily food and fried food. This disease is curable if detected at early stage. Once it becomes cirrhosis then the damage is irreversible. Liver transplant is one option but it is rather costly. Then Covid-19 is also a deadly disease. Its virus is here to stay. One may suffer nausea, cold, cough and fever in this disease. Paracetamol and antibiotics are given for its treatment. It is advised that one should take warm or lukewarm water.

As discussed above most of the fatal diseases are caused by malnutrition, sluggish life style, tobacco, alcohol, low intake of fiber and water. Now the need is to spread awareness about the causes, symptoms, precautions and cure of these diseases. Digital Media can be of great help in this direction. There is the habit of extensive use of social media by Indians. In India the average screen time of social media users is much higher than the global average of 2.28 hours a day. People use social media for satisfying their emotional needs, professional development, remaining in touch with other, entertainment, social status, self expression, catching public attention and education. A study reveals that most of the people in China make use of social media for seeking and sharing health awareness. Social media provides health awareness about multimedia which makes it easy for the people to understand it. Health literacy necessitates public knowledge, motivation and competency to access, understand and apply health information for improving the quality of life. Undoubtedly, Digital Media is unmatched in its speed, reach and impact. Though Radio, TV and Newspapers can also their little bit in this regard but spreading Health literacy through Digital Media can work wonders. Digital Media for healthcare can provide health information about a variety of diseases, provide answers to public queries, facilitate dialogue between doctor and patients and provide online communication. There is the need of training to health professionals and patients. This training or literacy will help maximize the utility of Digital Media in health Awareness. Increased awareness, easy accessibility, unlimited access and providing emotional support are among the benefits of Digital Media. But there are limitations also. The limitations include lack of reliability, less confidentiality and privacy. If patient privacy along with integrity of information shared is ensured then Digital Media can win many hearts and people will start trusting and using it for health care purpose. Studies show that 60-80% patients use internet to search health related information. Two third of them admit that such information helped them take appropriate decisions regarding their health. Covid has made a significant contribution in the public perception about seeking health awareness through Digital Media. In those days when there were lockdown all over the world, people had no option but to seek health related information on Digital Media. They realized that Digital Media has the potential to help them have consultations with their doctor. With rising face-to-face healthcare costs at an alarming rate, Digital Media is surely going to provide the solution to Health related issues.

Wearables are fast increasing. People use them to get information about their blood pressure, pulse rate and sugar levels. Markets are flooded with them. This Internet of Medical thing has expanded very rapidly. These wearables monitor biomarkers and give full indication of someone's health. These are very smart and sophisticated devices. Now people focus on self advocacy to improve patient's journey. data science technologies are quite useful to drill down to the personalized treatment. Most of people who suffer from diabetes have their own machines at their homes and they are able to have any eye to regulate their sugar level on daily basis at their

homes only. The same stands true about blood pressure apparatus. Digital and easy to handle and easy to operate gadgets have decreased the need to go to the doctor. With all these gadgets people can maintain the track record of their blood pressure levels. Digital transformation has started the process of the introduction of digital technologies in all spheres of health care. This digital healthcare business is increasing at a very rapid pace.

We have learnt that health literacy is the study and practice of providing health information to people and making them aware about health education. Various health campaigns have been launched by governments from time to time but they didn't yield desired results due to their limited reach. Digital Health Literacy is a unique niche in health care that allows patient to seek medicinal advice online and find out best medical centre or hospital around them. Doctors and hospitals also advertise themselves on Digital media. There is information about the facilities available for the patients. It makes the choice of patients very easy. Digital media helps to refine communication strategies to inform people about getting more awareness about virtually any disease. There is no doubt that health communication helps in increasing the awareness level of people. They get more awareness about their health and hygiene. They are now not only able to get health awareness through Digital Media; this media is also providing them literacy about the causes, symptoms and cure of diseases. This has been happening for the first time in the history of mankind. There a plethora of information about homoeopathic medicines and their usages. Then there is no dearth of information about naturopathy. People can choose the type of treatment they want to go for. They are no longer slave to the advice of money mongering private doctors and hospitals.

To sum up it can be said that Digital Health Literacy is the need of the Hour. But the abundance of disinformation on Internet is a big stumbling block. Governments should bring regulations to regulate this unregulated media so that there is only tangible and authentic information and people can rely on that. But there is not even an iota of doubt about the usefulness and utility of Digital Media which makes it imperative that people should be provided Digital Media Literacy which will help break many myths and which will save them from getting trapped in the web of highly costly hospitals.

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