E Mental Health and Its Future in South Asia

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Abstract: *The following article is about the significance as well as the contribution of e mental health in the world, since the twenty first century the world has evolved radically due to globalization and globalization, itself is a product of digitalization. With numerous electronic devices and technologies introduced for various purposes in the world, healthcare has also been introducing new biomedical technologies to improve health all over the globe. After the development of E health which included online doctor patent consultations and treatment, the specialized form E mental health was discussed where the utility of technology in mental health awareness and treatment was proposed. So, with the world moving forward towards e mental health solutions and interventions, it's very understandable and relevant to contextualize the south Asian interest in this area. This article further focuses on the cost effectiveness, benefits as well as the cultural barriers that E mental health might face.*

Introduction

The world evolved into what it is today during the nineteenth century when the Industrial Revolution came. The Industrialization led to development of various factories for production so naturally it required lots on manpower to function which is why more people decided to settle in urban areas where industries were being constructed, with time economy started to change its form as rapid population growth created room for more demand for production. During the same era, international transportation became much affordable when steamships were introduced, this gave more space to international businesses to export and import various products, Post World War 2, world governments decided to finally discuss strategies for open trade, international monetary and fiscal policies. These were the initial steps taken to bring the world onto one page, with the understanding of the terminology "universal" regulations were then made on the basis of a set, standardized pattern that could be generalized to all the countries. With all these policies and regulatory authorities coming into power to globalize the world, another very essential tool was brought that led to the radical and powerful social and technological change that we can see around us today and that tool was a personal computer.

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Although the use of the electric telegraph had become a convenient way of contacting another person, it was the invention of a PC, with all its force, that pushed the world towards a more digitalized form of communication. It can still be said that various forms of computers were already introduced around the nineteenth century but the development of a PC was very significant since it was much easier to use as an individual and it gave access to everyone. This way the cost of communication from afar became easier. So, with access to internet and newest forms of IT technologies, the world became a global village also known as the information age when a paradigm shift was seen from a traditional industry towards a more computerized, it based economy.

This is when all the businesses started to depend upon technology to assist in various functions that were very efficient and more cost effective. Most of the institutions of societies internalized the use of technology in their services for example the education sector, the business sector, the nonprofit sector, private as well as public sectors. With all of these sectors evolving due to the technological advancements in the world, the health sector also evolved in numerous ways due to the use of technology. From computerizing data of the patients and categorizing them into numerous further sub categories to providing online medicine slips that are sent directly to the pharmacist from the practitioner, from doing x-rays, ultrasounds and other radiological tests to diagnose an illness to perform computerized assisted surgeries and from holding board meetings with other doctors across the globe to doing collaborative researches on various diseases through online communication, the health sector has reached a pinnacle in achieving gold standards in providing quality healthcare based on calculative facts.

The world has definitely changed since computerized systems entered the healthcare domain. As people felt more at ease when a doctor's medical opinion was backed by a computerized test result. This further added to the credibility of a health practitioner's medical advice as well as made the practitioner's work much easier as the use of computers as well as humans together can produce a much more efficient result than simply a human's.

Telemedicine

The introduction to telemedicine came after the digital age as discussed earlier. With various innovative ways to provide services through the internet, healthcare services were also offered online. Telehealth is the distribution and consultation of health care services and health information through the use of telecommunication technologies. Telemedicine and Telemedicine are usually considered to be very similar terminologies and are used interchangeably although telehealth can be used to explain a broader range of services related to healthcare given to population whereas telemedicine can be used specifically to explore the pure clinical services within the e health domain.

E health has definitely brought a huge change in people's lives. Where it was difficult to reach to hospitals timely when someone needed urgent attention, it has now become so convenient to simply have a phone and a wifi connection to get a doctor online and consult him on time. Now health data management and keeping a record of patient's files have become so much easier for hospitals as neither do they need to keep re checking and adding into the patient's huge files nor does the patient needs to carry around huge piles of papers to one practitioner to another. Now with the

acceptability of e health especially in developed countries, have increased, it can be said that the access to quality healthcare consultations and treatments could be possible.

In developing countries such as Pakistan, e health has been introduced particularly in the urban areas and have been used by many locals however there are still a lot misconceptions and misunderstandings regarding the practice of e health moreover in the remote areas in Pakistan there is little or no internet connectivity which makes it a big hurdle to access online health portals and applications.

There are a lot of doubters about this methodology of online health services which will be discussed later in the chapter. This happens when there is less health awareness and understanding in a population and as a result a huge digital divide is constructed that is even harder to fill.

Lastly, patient satisfaction is also not a one hundred percent outcome of the e health services since online consultation might be enough for people not having a problem with it but could be an issue for many people especially elderly or children who might not feel comfortable and delighted on the thought of consulting and having a conversation with a doctor physically. Nonetheless e health still stands out to be a huge evolution of healthcare services.

E Mental Health

With E health being a promising provider of healthcare especially for remote areas, e mental health has also been greatly discussed as an adequate opportunity for people who can't access quality mental health services.

After thoroughly discussing the topic of e mental health and its possible interventions theoretically, the First International E Mental Health Summit was held in Amsterdam in 2009 where representatives from other countries were invited to contribute to the discussions that were done in the summit. Key figures including policy makers, academicians, health professionals and researchers stressed on the importance of e mental health interventions with the help of presentations on web-based diagnosis and treatment methodologies,

There have however been many concerns relating to e mental health interventions as well, particularly with ethics. The ethical issues especially concerning patients are a serious issue. Treating patients with mental disorders online can have its drawbacks as well. We shall look into these concerns further ahead.

Researches

A research was done in 2008 on Internet based treatment for adults with depressive symptoms by Warmerdam et.al where she tried to test how internet based cognitive behavioral therapy and problem-solving therapy could become an alternate to CBT on site. Total 263 participants were further divided into three groups for later correlation. The conclusion was the both internet-based treatments were proven to be successful in reducing depressive symptoms.

Another research was done by Straten et.al on the Effectiveness of a Web Based Self-Help Intervention for Symptoms of Depression, Anxiety and Stress. In this randomized control trial, 213

participants were present, selected had to then take a web based course of four weeks, various exercises were given each week through emails.

Conclusively, the idea proved to be very promising and the results suggested that e mental health treatments can be a useful idea for patients as well.

E Mental Health International Conference

Another important step taken to promote e mental health across the globe was to initiate international conferences to evaluate and internalize E mental health and its inventions. Some of the objectives of the conference in 2020 were to understand the exact roles that e mental health service delivery should be able to fulfill, to monitor national as well as international strategies and policies regarding e mental health enhancement as well as different researches on the practicality of its utility and functioning.

International Collaboration is also an integral part of the goals by this conference, as discussed earlier with globalization, the world is now moving towards universality in providing services to people so the poor quality of living could be improved globally, which is why the importance of international networking and collaboration in each and every scientific or technological development has to become a key part so that the world can build a more holistic, centralized, powerful and controlled system dedicated to provide quality care. Global Health access is probably the most important aspect of international development and collaboration today.

In South Asian Context

South Asia is the southern region of Asia, this region consists of Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka. The population of South Asia is a staggering amount of 1.891 billion also known to be one forth of the world's population, making it the most densely populated region in the whole world.

According to the World Health Organization, South Asia is the only area still affected with polio. Attempts to eradicate polio has been a difficult effort since mostly mountainous areas were difficult to approach by the polio vaccination workers and the cultural barriers were very hard to break.

On the other side, India is one of the countries badly affected by malnutrition even today, with one of the highest-ranking numbers where children die from malnutrition. Other than that diseases like Malaria, Dengue, Yellow fever, Typhus, Whooping Cough, tuberculosis and more.

The status of women in South Asia is also reported to be very low with nutritional knowledge and basic education ranking very low in reports. All of these factors have severely affected the health status in South Asia which is why the world is trying to desperately find an effective solution to timely health needs provision.

Mental health in South Asia is also a serious issue, like in many other cultures and areas in the world, in Asia, mental health is still considered a taboo where people have to hide about their serious health issues just to look 'normal' and socially acceptable in the society.

South Asian countries have a higher disease burden of psychiatric illness. A study reported that there's a prevalence of 14.2 percent for common mental disorders, this is even higher than the worldwide pool prevalence of disease which is 13. 4 percent.

With these statistics, there is a dire need of effective solutions for a better healthcare, which is why e mental health has become a serious talk for South Asia.

Why Do We Need Web Based Treatment?

There is definitely a need for web base treatment in countries like Pakistan. This is because of the difficulty of mobility in Pakistan. There are many areas in Pakistan where access to quality healthcare is not possible and mostly areas where the standard income of individuals cannot afford to travel long distances to urban areas. This is where the need of a web-based treatment is required. Online consultations can prove to be very useful as travel costs will be cut down and accessibility to a competent health specialist can be easier.

With relation to E mental health services, as mentioned above, consultations can be easily and more efficiently done just like any other medical consultations through e health services although another very distinct benefit given to only e mental health is that the stigmatization of mental health diseases and people getting bullied or ridiculed from seeking psychological help because of the cultural taboos could no more happen as the web based consultations are one on one meetings that can be done privately and while being in the comfort of ones own home which makes it rather easier to avoid unnecessary attention.

Conclusion

E Health is not the future but the present for todays healthcare service, many countries, cultures and cities have accepted this as a part of their lives especially in the times of the infectious Covid 19 pandemic, it is far better to get web-based treatments. Just like E health, E Mental Health should also be taken very seriously as a great option for a better, more efficient and cost-effective strategy to provide one on one counselling sessions to masses.

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