

# Editorial

## Using smartphones in Psychiatry for service delivery

The number of mobile phones in India just crossed 1 billion; 323 million accessed internet in 2016, which happens to be 23.4% of total population.<sup>1</sup> India is supposed to have more users than USA. Sometimes it is jokingly said that there are mobile phones in the family but no toilets. Even village teenagers are using smart phones with both front and rear camera. This is one thing that is advantageous in use of technology in delivering mental health care. Most of the population is young and techsmart. Mental health morbidity in India is 10.6% with 6% showing suicidal risk. Treatment gap is 85% for common mental disorders and 95% for substance use disorders (NIMHANS SURVEY).<sup>2</sup> This huge gap can be bridged through use of appropriate technology particularly digital technology.<sup>3</sup>



The average Indian is known for “Jugad” and uses technology in innovative ways to serve him. Before we became conscious of potential of technology, people were coming with videos of the patients behavior at home. This provided an immense opportunity to distinguish dissociative disorder or nonepileptic attacks from true seizures and this lead to many of us now asking for the video recordings. These were also useful in diagnosing other disorders particularly movement disorders.

Another use of smartphones is when patients family members will come and connect the patient and family members through video chat. This is very useful for patients residing at a distance and also for some persons who are working abroad and does not require either high level of literacy, technological sophistication or money.

Since there is acceptability of mobile technologies we should be equally innovative in providing services particularly to the disadvantaged section of the society. There are attempts to use digital technology for mental health.

SCARF foundations’ use of mobile vans with teleconferencing facility and pharmacy is one such example of successful use of technology.

Systemic Medical Appraisal Referrals and Treatment (SMART) mental health programmed for rural India. It won a grand challenge of Canada award for innovation.<sup>4</sup> It aims to train Accredited social health activist (ASHA) workers to provide treatment under guidance of doctors. Although it is still in preliminary stage, covering 30 villages with 1200 population, tabs with internet connection are provided to ASHA workers who in turn will work in tribal population to provide mental health services.

Government of India has launched mHealth initiative and out of 4 programmes initially launched, one is m-Cessation programmes, mobile app for which is available on National Health Portal (NHP). This provides tips to quit smoking. Tele medicine programmes of different hospitals can be converted to mobile based programmes which will make them more user friendly. Individual practitioners have been successfully using skype and other programmes to provide psychotherapy and treatments.

It is now a time to embrace new technologies to provide better care for our patients and reach the people who are inaccessible due to geographical location or stigma and also special population like women and adolescents.

### **References**

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